

In Series
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There is a Moment in each Day that Satan cannot find
--William Blake

September 9th, 2004

William Felker is alone on the floor with a pack of cheap matches. Someone had left the matchbook propping up one leg of a study desk in Calverson Memorial Library, but William removed it. The desk wobbled a second longer than it should have, then stabilized with half an echo. Now moonlight filters through the off-white Venetian blinds (designed to blend in with the off-white walls and the off-white ceiling) and lands on the desks, the carpet, his face. He scratches his chin absently. 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. The racket of the watch hands had become deafening. Clock time stifled him with its endless finitude.

The library is otherwise uninhabited, as 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 paperback classics. He can't sleep most nights and instead spends them leafing through Henry James. Though he has been on leave for the past three semesters, his professorial habits refuse to fade--he fights off periodic compulsions to underline key passages for later reference.

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. Looking up, 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--at fifty-six, his joints seem to have more or less given up. 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. The journey back to the start is always arduous, he thinks to himself. Somehow the certainty of the already-happened is more slippery than the mysteries of possibility.

William opens the matchbook, removes a match. Strikes it. Watches the flame: the simplicity, the causality, the rhythm of it. Rhythm exists only in the space between moments, and each moment exists only in the space between the head of the match and the flame. His fingers begin to burn. Startled, he tosses the match aside, into one of the bookshelves. Removes another match, strikes it. Once the flame is there, it will always have been there. He lets the match burn down a little farther, drops it on the carpet. Removes and strikes a third match, drops it on the table. The flame catches on the table's surface, glides like a dead leaf over glassy water.

He stands up and moves to the window, pressing his face against the blinds as the growing flames flicker behind him, surrounded by the pages of the past. "The things

we do," he says, sighing, and the one unavoidable truth is that time must by necessity run forward.

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August 28th, 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 weeks. He is surprised to realize the house intimidates him. 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 or welcome, 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 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 one, thicker and more jagged 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. 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 through the window, he thinks he can see his wife's breath crystallize.

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July 22nd, 2004

It is midday. William stares at the calendar, which still says May, from his place at the table. He says, "It's been over two months now." What he means is, *We'll get through 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. Closes his eyes. "It's too much," 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.

* * *

May 16th, 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 their 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 kisses her lightly on the forehead, and she half-smiles in her sleep.

William steps into the adjacent room where his son's agitation is even louder. A careful change of diaper isn't enough to silence the baby's cries. William cradles his son to his chest and walks down the carpeted stairs towards the kitchen. The baby breathes shallow, congested breaths into William's warm shoulder.

At the foot of the landing there is a pile of books that has been tipped over. In the darkness, William's left foot lands directly on one of the books, which slides forward under his weight. For a split second, he and the baby are one in their freefall, before the momentum wrests the baby from William's desperate grasp. A beat. William falls to one side. The baby flies, swimming through the humid air, infant arms immobile, completely

devoid of instinct. A beat. William completes his fall, legs crumpling, arms flailing. The baby spins, twists, lands on the linoleum with a sickening thud. A beat.

There is movement again. Teresa thunders down the stairs, instantly awake; the sound of the fall cut off whatever dream she might have been 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, and what's done is done.

* * *

July 2nd, 2003

William and Teresa have just made love. The bed is still warm with the energy of it. They curl their bodies together under the sheets. William absentmindedly picks a stray hair from the pillow.

They decided two weeks ago to finally try for a baby, and tonight the timing was finally right for Teresa. Babies make William feel old and obsolete, but he thinks that his own baby would be more of a comfort. There are so many things he wants to pass on.

Teresa kisses his shoulder and smiles warmly. "It's going to be so wonderful," she says.

William returns the smile. "Yes," he says. "From now on."