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In these early years of wide-eyed expectancy, Eli hugely anticipated Sunday excursions with his father to Princeton University's mammoth, labyrinthine library, not least because these jaunts typically ended with breakfast at the pancake house directly across Nassau Street (or Lincoln Highway, the archaic name still used only by Tobias), with Eli sprinting around the corner of the library, accelerating to the row of elm trees lining the street, leaping atop the stone fence separating campus from town. *Look Daddy! I'm a giant beast!* Tobias would smile and grab Eli's hand and they would saunter across the street into P.J.'s, the syrup and butter in Eli's mind's eye already melting on the stack.

But business before pleasure (always before pleasure). Tobias striding through the grand portal into the library galleria, steaming past the circulation desk, flanking card catalogs, oblivious to stares from students, nodding to colleagues, mind now locking in, connecting physical books with unique LC classification numbers, tagging specific shelves on specific floors, illuminating his preferences for specific authors, specific editions, particular publishers, with annotations and bibliographic references from these publications arcing out to other books, journal articles, pamphlets, and manuscripts, some of these tomes terminal points, others way stations on the journey to yet further intellectual destinations.

Tobias descending to the lowest basement level of the library, settling into the desk at his carrel, the sliding door open a crack, tilting back in his chair, calling out instructions to that good son Eli, who having followed his father down the stairways at a breathless clip, grabbing the railings and vaulting the steps with astounding leaps and bounds, was prepared to execute those instructions, understanding full well the scope of his responsibilities during these adventures within the cathedral of knowledge.

Eli, dearest boy, run to Stack E173, will you, son? Race the wind for me and get me the 5th book from the 4th shelf. You'll know it. Farrand's Records of the Federal Convention of 1787. That would be call number KF4510.F3. Yes, yes. It's not in the history section. But Eli, I need the 1937 edition, not the 1911 edition. Oh, and Eli, did you know Max Farrand received his PhD from Princeton in 1892? Even a bit before my time! Run along, Eli. Oh. Eli! Son! Retrieve yourself, will you? I also need two other books. The third volume from the Wirt edition of Patrick Henry's papers – that would be E302.6.H5, yes, in the American history section. And, finally, I need the John Witherspoon papers. Yes, esteemed president of our esteemed university. Twice esteemed, we are, Eli. I need Witherspoon's Annotated Edition of Lectures on Moral Philosophy. The call number is BJ1005.xW5. Yes, on the religion shelves. Off you go, boy! Show me your speed!

Even as a tyke, physical proximity to books laved Eli with assurance that ideas mattered, their numinous force yet lighting and warming the world. Books were his friends, inviting intimacy, unstiffening and conforming to his touch, paternal glow of ancestral wisdom passing into his, Eli's, receptive fingers, reassuring him that this labyrinth of knowledge presented a thread, winding endlessly between the stacks of books, which would always, eventually, guide him safely home.

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Eli lived in a capacious stone house with a slate roof and a long curving driveway. On autumnal Sunday library jaunts, he and his father routinely skirted the university's oversized horseshoe-shaped football stadium, where a maintenance crew helmed by wiry Mr. B., with a wet cigarette dangling from his lips like a guppy, his flashlight on his hip, was harvesting trash and restoring order from the previous day's football game.

In this arc from Saturday to Sunday, Eli tested the boundaries between sin and grace. He was a small, slender boy. A good boy, as Tobias did like to say. But sly, as well. And secretive. Slender and sly and secretive.

On those prelapsarian football Saturdays, Eli sprinted barricaded streets toward the football stadium. Unlike Sunday communion with his father, these were mostly and by design, covert missions, solo and unencumbered. The whole point was not to domesticate the experience. Eli never bought a ticket and had perfected the art – exquisitely pleasurable – of sneaking into the stadium just before game time.

At these games, typically, Eli gained entry by edging sideways behind an adult couple pressing through the gate. As the unsuspecting adults handed over their tickets, Eli rested his hands lightly on their backs, turned his head as if he couldn't see the exchange, and in that moment the illegitimacy of his deception, properly speaking, disappeared. Invisible, then, even to himself, Eli magically prestidigitated to the other side of the gate. *He was in!* Warm with glee, Eli ascended the narrow steps to the rim of the stadium, claiming the entire bowl, the world his.

Eli's parents were not aware of his magical, prestidigitating powers. However, they were aware of his affinity for athletic buildings, which among most Ivy League schools were old, vast, taurean monuments to manly strain and sweat. When the university began a year-long remodel of iconic basketball palace, Dillon Gym, Eli's parents warned Eli to stay away from the construction site. They knew from experience open pits incited him like catnip.

Of course, Eli ignored his parents. The main floor of the gymnasium, stripped of its impediments, soared like a gothic church, cantilevered as if to bend precisely to his dreams. On those wintry Sunday mornings, those rare days when his father pattered or slept in, he sped on his Sting Ray

toward the gym, fueled by the prospect of intertemporality, that time warp between the parking lot where he dropped his bike and the fence under which he slithered, when the mechanics of the universe shifted, a displacement (had he known the term), slanting the odds in his favor, rearranging the world just so, according to his requirements, dispelling the weight of an arbitrary, overweening authority.

Eli roamed the empty cavern, clambering heavy equipment, pawing the dirt, tales unfolding before him within this arc of the spirits. Eli battling titans, dark and faceless and nameless warriors, a frozen witch queen, sable minions. He slid to the bottom of the pit, 25 feet below the main floor of the gym. From its depths, the light above retreated.

He could see Mr. B., now peering from the main floor into the darkness where Eli crouched. Mr. B. addressed the pit with his torch. Eli squatting with his hands flattened in the dirt, fingers spread, summoning his invisibility. The torch paused on his face, then resumed its sweep. *Mr. B. had not seen him!* Mr. B. recommenced his rounds, releasing Eli to scamper toward a beckoning shaft of light. The underbelly of the gym, molten and pregnant with secrets.