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Ink

(The Book of All Hours 2)

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Extract

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PROLOGUE

Words of Rogue Desire

The Story, So Far

The story, so far removed in time and space and so far-fetched, seemed an exotic fabrication when I first heard it from my uncle's lips, those lips with a hint of sly smile at the upturned corners, just enough to crinkle crow's feet round his eyes. Uncle Reynard, the rake, the rogue. He'd heard of my first story sale, my desire to be a writer, and invited me to visit; he had a story for me, he said, a family legend worth a book at least.

I'd arrived at his tiny Bank Street flat to an exuberant welcome from his wagtailed mongrel, Koré, been settled into a seat on the black leather sofa with a gin and tonic and an ashtray on the occasional table to my side.

He lit up a cigarette for himself and began his tale.

– Your grandfather, Captain Jack Carter, he said, returned from the Great War a changed man. He'd seen the blood and mud of the Somme first-hand, ordered men to their deaths, ordered them shot for cowardice. He carried his memories as a secret burden, my mother said, one that he could never relieve himself of. One day, he received a telegram from an old professor of his – Hobbsbaum, I think his name was – and with only the briefest of farewells to his darling Anna who was heavy at the time with your father and myself, he left his pregnant wife and set out for the Middle East, never to be seen again.

Uncle Reynard paused for effect, manipulative old codger that he was.

– He disappeared into the Vellum, he said.

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– Vellum? I said.

He took a sip of his gin and tonic.

– An unwritten page has such potential, don't you think? he said. As a writer? Anything could be shaped in ink upon that . . . substrate. A million worlds waiting to be conjured by the feathery flick of a pen across paper. And even after you've graved your artifice of order onto that blank slate, don't you find that there are always still the spaces between the words, the possibilities you can still read in the gaps between the lines?

He smiled.

– You think I'm talking in metaphors. I am, I suppose. I'm trying to put this in a way you'll understand. A story doesn't just start at the beginning and trundle onwards in a straight line to the end. The same story can be – and *is* – told in different ways by different writers, each one taking their own path, branching the story out from one dimension to two. The same story can be – and *is* – retold in different ways by different generations. Revising the earlier drafts of those who came before, building our stories on the remnants of the past, those retellings give the tales a third dimension. Then as we read, following the trail of ink, we move in those three dimensions, skimming onwards and skipping back, diverted to the side here and there as we consider the invisible lateralities of what might have been, digging down into the strata of residual tales, the dead truths palimpsested by this new text.

– This is a metaphor for time, he said. This is the nature of the Vellum. Time has three dimensions, just like space.

The parallel worlds of quantum physics or alternate history were familiar enough ideas to me but the idea of . . . *previous* realities . . .

– I'm not sure I–

– We live in a tiny groove on the surface of a great sphere, he said, in a little valley of reality, seeing only ahead of us and behind us. There are other valleys in the Vellum, plains where time stretches out into wide fields of illusion, where you can easily stray from the path, stray so far that when you look back you see a past which is no longer yours. And there are rifts, fault lines where the shifting continents have folded stone, thrown elder worlds up into mountain chains that dwarf us with their primal majesty. Take a step out of

this world and you can find yourself with the scree of myths under your feet, staring at the fossilised feather of an angel's wing, embedded in the face of a cliff in front of you. Just a second. Wait there.

He pushed himself up from his chair and left the room. Through the open door I could see him cross the square hallway of his one-bedroom flat – his bachelor pad, as he called it – and enter his study. A moment later he returned with what looked like a humidor, the size of a shoe-box, maybe a little larger, every inch of its surface carved with intricate abstractions, its lid hinged and clasped in brass.

– Your grandfather disappeared into the Vellum, he said. But he sent this back to us. Your father wanted to burn it, but I stopped him. I thought you should have it. Your *grandfather* thought you should have it.

He laid it on my lap.

– He says so on the first page.

I unclicked the clasp, the hinge of the box creaking as I opened the lid. Inside it was crammed full of papers – loose scraps and notebooks – pages yellowed and leather bindings brittle as autumn leaves. It smelled of dust and decay – a hint of sulphur, I thought – and under my touch I could feel a grit of sand or salt crusting the smooth but crumbling surfaces of cured skin and bleached parchment.

As my uncle had said, the page on top – half a page, actually, torn roughly from some cheap book and used as a note – said that this mystery was meant for me.

For my grandson, Reynard, it read, *unborn and unwritten as of yet. May you make of this folly a future free of destiny. Bind the Book into a book.*

Jack Carter, Palestine, 1929.

– I don't understand, I said. A future free of destiny? What book?

– The Book of All Hours, said my uncle. From what I can gather, what I can make sense of in there, it's … the blueprint of this Vellum, of all reality, all *unreality*, graved into eternal certainty in a grimoire that might have been written by God himself, if you believe in that sort of thing. A manual of mathematics and metaphysics, written in the language of the angels – the Cant he calls it – the language that binds reality.

– The Book of All Hours? I said.

– Read it and see, he said.

Once upon a Time

– Once upon a time, Jack had said to me, there was a book called *Once upon a Time*; and it was *all about* a boy called Jack. But Jack, well, he didn't really give a flying fuck for books, being more into toy guns and shit, so he just took his felt-tip pens and scribbled all over it until you couldn't read a word in all the mess of ink, and boy did he get fucking whipped for it.

He'd looked at me, there in the garden.

– That's the story of my life, he'd said, just a mess of ink. And that's the Book of All Hours, Guy, the fucking Book of All fucking Hours. That's how I got my scars.

I'd thought of the first words of the Book: *In the beginning*. From the Hobben word, *bereshit*, which, translated into Versid, gave the first chapter its common name: *Genesis*.

Once upon a time, I'd thought, was probably a fair enough translation for that book of origins, of the Havens and the Aerth summoned into existence by the breath of Zeus over the void. It seems a good enough way to start this account.

Once upon a time there was a boy named Jack.

I met Jack in Poudre Valley Hospital in Laramie, North Manitu, where he had been admitted for treatment to his wounds, and where in my capacity as consultant psychologist I'd been called in to assess him as a suicide risk. A lattice of scars across his chest told a history of self-harm or abuse, but the more visible signs were … sickening. Three days before, Jack had taken a pair of garden shears and used them to cut off his wings, this after removing his horns with a hacksaw and a power-sander, his file told me. Sitting there on the edge of the bed, facing out the window, with the dressing on his back clearly visible beneath his gown, and with the bandages around his head – a shock of fire-blond hair sticking out above like burning corn – Jack told me that he'd never actually had wings … not really.

– No horns either, he said.

Body dysmorphia was my immediate thought.

Then he told me he was a changeling.

At that first meeting with Jack, I did not bother taking notes. In such circumstances I usually prefer a conversational approach; it helps the patient to relax and open up, puts them more at ease than they would be with a clip-boarded stranger's more orthodox and official interrogation; also it allows for a more informal observation on my part. I remember noticing the lack of any cards or flowers in the room, the spartan environment of a patient without well-wishers, in keeping with his distant air. No wings to fold around himself to warm him in the Hinter's chill.

– No family, he said. Not in this world, Doc. I'm a changeling, you see. I'm an orphan Orpheus, looking for my . . . Eurydike.

Later I was to learn that Jack's parents were unknown, this son of theirs abandoned to Social Services, shuffled from foster home to foster home – his records lost in a fire, the administrator of one orphanage would tell me. Maybe, one might almost think, he *did* slip through from some other world. Maybe he *did* belong elsewhere, elsewhen.

But at that first meeting I just looked around his room for any accoutrements of identity. The only object that spoke of comfort either desired or given was a copy of the Gideon's Book of All Hours laid open on the bedside cabinet. It didn't strike me as unusual, here in the Midwest of Amorica, heartland of a culture steeped in evangelical faith. One of the questions I was asked most often by colleagues attempting friendly conversation was what church I'd gone to back in Albion. I'd hem and haw and confess that, actually, I wasn't a believer. They'd look shocked for a second – more confused than shocked, really, not understanding why on earth one would not want the love of Our Lord Adonis in one's life – then the topic would be changed.

The Book simply showed that Jack was not entirely divorced from the world around him.

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– You've been reading the Book, I say.

I sit down on the edge of the bed and pick the Gideon's up off the cabinet to see what parable or prophecy he's in the midst of. These little things are often good indicators of a patient's state of mind, you see: depressives tend to like the Book of Hob, identifying with that most hapless, hopeless man and using his long-suffering tenacity as a stick to beat themselves with in comparison; the neurotic, on the other hand, tend to focus on the New Testament, seeking the constant support, the affirmation and reaffirmation, of an ever-loving Christ; schizoids, of course, always go for Revelations.

Jack's copy is open at the Song of Salamander, the only part of the Book I've ever really had much time for myself, I have to say, neither parable nor prophecy but simply poetry.

– *Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth*, says Jack – the first line of the Song of Salamander, the Song of Songs.

He turns to look at me and I notice the flecks of silvery fire that shimmer in his blue irises, the glints of gold. *He's a faery*, I realise. It clicks into place, this delusion of his that he's from another world, from the world of wingless graey, in fact. I imagine his past. Some Angelo-Satyr mother looks at her child for the first time and sees that shimmer to its skin, a glint in its eye just a little more sensuous than it should be. Did she herself hate it or was there some beer-swilling father, scattering dishes from the kitchen counter with a brutal sweep of his arm, spreading his great black wings in fury and threat over her? *Get that thing out of my house.* A child growing up in the care of those who did not care, realising he was different from his peers.

Christ, it's only a few weeks since the murder of Thomas Messenger shamed the town, the state, the whole of Amorica. How cosmopolitan is it here, even in a college town of frat boys and keggers?

So he's a changeling, he decides. He's not even a part of this world that would murder an innocent like Thomas Messenger simply for being a faery.

I try to lead him through this rationalisation, this explanation,

but he cuts me off the moment the murdered student's name comes out of my mouth, with a look of such pain and anger and . . . Zeus, I understand a whole lot more.

– I knew him as Puck, he says with a voice so thick with swallowed sorrow I can hardly understand the words.

Jack's boyfriend, Puck, had been lost to him on a hillside that Evenfall – Octochre 16th to be precise – beaten to death by two fay-hating thugs who'd picked him up in a bar on the promise of a threesome.

– That's when I knew, Jack had said. Death opens up your eyes, Doc. If it doesn't close them and put pennies on the fucking lids.

We sat on a wooden bench in the hospital garden, myself with my wings tucked tight under a fleece-lined anorak, huddled against the bitter Damnuary air, Jack in his dressing gown hung open, cord dangling loose. He seemed impervious to the cold, too fired up as he was with his anger.

He blew a plume of steam into the air and peered at me; he knew this was the day of my meeting with the chief of staff, knew that I'd be leaving here to give my recommendation for his future here or in the outside world – commitment as a hazard to himself, medication for depression or psychosis, keep him in for further observation, or cut him loose and let him sink or swim.

– Christ, Guy, I'm not going to kill myself, he said. I'd rather live just to spite the fuckers. Flight or fight? Fuck, I'm going to light fires under their fucking feet.

– I started to remember it all at the funeral, says Jack. I was thinking about how we first met. It was in this Social Studies class. We just clicked, like we'd known each other all our lives. At the funeral I started to remember that we *had. All* our lives.

He sits in one of the leather armchairs I have positioned on either side of the window in my office, facing each other for just such conversations, just such confessions. It's our third or fourth meeting. Sorry, I find it hard to keep a straight line to my thoughts these days.

– We were like children playing in the Illusion Fields, he continues. Let's pretend. One day we'd be soldiers in the First World War – Captain 'Mad' Jack Carter, Private Thomas Messenger.

Another day, I'd be a seraphim sent to hunt him down across this weird graey version of Amorica. We'd lie in bed together and go to sleep in this world, only to wake up in a town called Endhaven, amongst black-suited refugees from a nanotech apocalypse. We've been shepherds in Arcadia and rent-boys on the streets of Sodom, Doc. I've crossed deserts wider than the world because he dared me. I've led armies to destruction because he was in danger. I remembered it all – Christ, it was like being born again – as I was standing there at his funeral, listening to the Minister spout his bullshit. We've lived a million lives and always ended up together, whatever fold of the Vellum we were in.

What he's describing is a psychotic break, a retreat from the horror of reality into elaborate fantasies of eternity.

– And in these other . . . *folds*, I say, Puck didn't die?

– Oh, no, says Jack. He always dies. You should know that, Reynard. You should remember too.

The Undecided World

It's three in the morning and I should be in bed, but I've always been a night owl, so instead I'm getting out of my car and crunching through the snow into the all-night convenience store to buy a pack of cigarettes I could probably wait until tomorrow morning for. Melissa's on duty again and I smile.

– Hi, Melissa.

She's in her early twenties, drop-dead gorgeous and a total flirt for my accent. First time I came in, she was chatting to a friend when I asked her if they stocked Regals. She started interrogating me about where I was from, what I was doing here, how long I was staying, charmingly excited by this stranger in a strange land.

– Say my name, she said finally.

– Melissa? I said, confused.

– Say it again.

– Melissa?

– Gosh, it sure sounds so much better the way you say it than the folks round here.

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Outside, I tap a cigarette out of the packet and light it before I slip back into the driver's seat of my car, pull the door shut, blow out a billow of smoke. I reach up to adjust the rear-view mirror and, leaning into it, I see my own reflection. I don't have any horns. I don't have to touch my shoulders to know that my wings are also absent. I have a passing notion that there's something wrong about this – should I be disturbed? – but then I realise that, of course, of course, this is just what Jack was telling me about. We all live simultaneously in a myriad of folds, those on Aerth dreaming of Havens for their dead, those in the Havens dreaming of Aerths for those alive. So, then, there's nothing really strange about the cats-eyes looking back at me from the rear-view mirror; it all makes perfect sense.

The world just hasn't decided which reality it wants to be.

The next morning, as I potter through my daily ritual of Earl Grey and waffles with maple syrup, I'll notice the pack of cigarettes on the kitchen table and remember the dream and the normality that inspired it. I'll remember this feeling of satori I had in my slumber – *the world hasn't decided* – and find it funny. My subconscious, it seems, is rather enamoured of Jack's delusion.

I'll shake it off, of course. I'll look in the mirror at my horns and wings, my reassuringly human eyes, and all will be right with the world. Jack's psychosis is just that – psychosis. It's strange that in these other folds he has imagined for the two of them Puck dies; it jars with the usual pattern of denial delusions; but I'll figure it out in time, as we carry on our sessions.

I don't realise that more dreams like this will come, more frequent, more intense, over the next few weeks, until I am no longer sure that they are dreams at all.

– I think you know I'm right, says Jack. You're just not willing to take the plunge yet. You're just not willing to admit it.

– So you're saying that *you're* sane? It's the rest of us who're crazy?

He shrugs, grins.

– One of the folds I knew Puck in – Endhaven – it had these windmills up on a hill outside of town. He told me once he used to

imagine they were giants when he was a kid and I said, well, you know, they might be. It's like Don Quixote . . . but like in that movie where what's-his-face thinks he's Sherlock Holmes in 1970s New York. George C. Scott. He says to his shrink, you know, maybe Quixote was right. They might just be windmills. But they might be giants. I think maybe they're both. Maybe the world hasn't decided yet. They could – what's up?

My pen is stopped over my notepad. *The world hasn't decided yet.* My jaw may not be literally dropped, but the shock of the synchronicity is clearly showing on my face. I shake my head, try to laugh it off.

– Nothing, I say.

That night I have another dream.

Insanity is a City

Insanity is a city, he thinks, a haunting, hounding maze of monsters given stone flesh. Madness made real. Angels rumbling with demons. Gods with wings of steel sweeping down out of the skies to scatter humanity to dust.

He staggers out of the alley, coat gripped closed with white-knuckled hands. Behind him, the angel's screams are dying into a gurgle of blood in a throat, drowning in the baying of the mob. Insanity is a city, he thinks.

He walks down cobbled streets, through shaded courtyards, wide plazas of marble flagstones with stone benches and ornamental fountains, barren trees and snow-mantled statues. There are tram stops, bus stops, but he has no money for this fold, so he just watches where the rattling dinosaur-machines go lumbering, and follows the ones whose frontboards proclaim Stadde Cintrale, until he reaches what may or may not be the City Centre with its shops and arcades, pedestrian precincts, a tourist centre with racks of maps and bus routes. He picks up one of each – thirty, forty of them – filling his pockets with numbered trails that snake through this district or that quarter. All he wants is to find somewhere he feels safe. He has nothing here but the clothes on his back and a book whose only purpose now is to carry the reminder of his name, scrawled on its frontispiece.

He clutches the Book of All Hours to his chest, his last connection with his own identity.

It used to be a book of maps, he's sure. He's sure he can remember a time when it was a book of maps, each turned page showing the world at an exponentially increasing scale – streets, cities, countries, continents, and larger still, impossibly larger, vast fields of reality like the surface of some gas giant, page after page scaling up to inconceivable distances. A guidebook to eternity, to the Vellum.

He remembers graving human lives as glyphs upon its parchment.

He remembers cramming its yellowed surface with sigils that crawled across the page even as the people that they marked moved through their daily lives.

He remembers these gravings multiplying into a storm of ink, obscuring the terrain drawn underneath, skittering here and there as if they sought to tell, in combination, some strange, shifting story of Evenfall.

Then the Hinter came, and he lost . . . what did he lose?

The last time he looked, every page in the Book of All Hours was as blank as the white waste of snow and bone around him, featureless plains of vellum stretching out beneath his fingers, his own glyph fading to grey. Sitting at the last remnants of his burnt-down campfire, hypothermia blurring his mind, he'd scrawled his name in charcoal on the opening page before passing out, a message to whoever found his body.

– *Es mortu*, he'd heard a voice say.

– *Neh, es liffen*.

Then he'd woken up in the city, in a hospital of sorts. He'd taken his clothes out of the locker by his bed, put them on, picked up the Book and just walked out the door, into a city at the end of time, where mobs of teenagers broke the wings of angels in the alleyways, tortured them for sport.

A homeless man sits huddled at the entrance to a covered escalator which glides down, step turning over step, to the subway station at the foot of an elaborate iron bridge of electric candelabra streetlights and wrought heraldry emblazonings. Posters for gigs and clubs peel from its square stone pillars and Reynard watches the people passing

into and out of the brown perspex entrance with its garish orange U for *underground*; some of them wear suits, others dress casual, but all of them look soft, middle-class – even the ones in ripped, badged thriftwear. Across the bridge a Gothic spire rises up from among a jumble of sandstone walls, slate roofs and branches. A pine furniture shop sits beside the stone steps that lead down, parallel to the escalator, to the car park and grass patched with snow around the subway station. It's a university district of lecturers and students, professional bohemians and bohemian professionals. The street-map that he carries shows a large park down there to the south, nestling in a nook of river, a good place to sleep rough if it comes to that, if he can't find a doorway to shelter him from the Hinter night.

He's standing, leaning on the bridge, and trying to stop his shakes – as he has been for the last ten minutes – when he feels the hand on his shoulder.

– *Nove migres?*

It's the homeless man. Reynard shrugs, shakes his head, blithers desperate apologies, his body still shaking with that tension between laughter and tears. *I don't understand. I don't understand.* He trails his fingers through his hair.

– *Peregrim nove en de stadde, ev? Tu ne sprash lingischt?*

– No, he sort of understands. No, I don't speak the language.

And the man reaches into his cup and gives him, with a toothless grin, a goldish coin.

– *Per kave*, he says, pointing over the bridge at God knows what. *Kave, ev?*

He lifts the cup to his lips, tilts it once, twice. Kave.

Reynard nods dumbly, realises that the tension has released itself; he's both laughing and crying as he says – *Thank you. Thank you.*

Out of Fable and Folklore

My last meeting with Jack was even less official than the first, not even a meeting as much as a farewell. It was months later and the wounds on his back had long since healed. Apart from the scarred stumps on his forehead and the eerie absence of wings, which gave

him the somewhat eldritch appearance of a graey straight out of fable and folklore, he was quite healthy, physically speaking. Stretching his arms out wide and arching his back as he stood just outside the sliding glass doors of the hospital entrance, as if gathering the morning-fresh air and the future to him, he had a limber grace, moving the way an athlete does, entirely at one with his body. He looked over his shoulder as the porter whirled his wheelchair away, back through the doors into the hospital.

– Thank fuck, Jack had said. Christ, I'm not a fucking cripple.

I'd shrugged, smiled wryly. He'd complained about being wheeled all the way to the door.

– Hospital policy, Jack. Insurance.

– I'm fucking fine, he'd said.

I knew, of course, that he still considered himself a changeling, but by now I also knew that he was not entirely insane in this respect. A little, but not entirely. No more so than I myself.

– I'm fucking fine, says Jack. Peachy keen.

As he stretches, rolling his shoulder-blades like a rower, for some reason I have 'Could We Start Again Please?' from *Adonis Christ Superstar* running through my head. Not exactly the sort of music you hear on the hospital radio here, not in this corner of Amorica so touchy about faith and blasphemy. A white cloud condenses in the chill morning air, the whistle of the tune under my breath. Sometimes, I must confess, I miss the old country and its heathen irreverence; I want to hijack the radio and pump the Sex Pistols out across the wards at full blast. I told Jack once about that idea and he nearly pissed himself laughing.

– So what the fuck are you doing here? he'd asked. I mean, what the fuck is an old public-school rebel doing out here in the Midwest . . . in the middle of fucking nowhere?

– I rather suppose I was looking for a fresh start, I'd said.

A sloughing rustle of snow slips from the overloaded branch of a tree to land on the bonnet of a car – sorry, the *hood* of a car. Beyond the parking lot, the mist and the shadows of the treeline meld into a bleak grey nothing.

The Hinter is harsher here too than it was back home.

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– You should go home, says Jack. Back to Albion. You know you don't really belong here. You, me, Puck . . . we never belonged here.

I don't answer. Later I'll go back to my office and I'll sit there looking at the copy of the Book of All Hours I keep on the shelf behind my chair, now lifted down and laid upon my desk. Later I'll lock my door and twirl the blind closed to hide me from any passing prurient eyes and from the backwards golden lettering on the glass which reads *Guy Reynard Carter, MD, Psychological Consultant.* I'll open a window and I'll drag my chair into the centre of the room, so I can stand on it to lever the batteries from the smoke detector, so I can have a cigarette as I leaf through the pages of the Book. Later.

Right now I don't want to think about what I've learned from Jack in the two and a half months he's been my patient. Right now I don't want to think of the realities of the Havens out there in the Hinter, not some mythical paradise, some pie in the sky when you die, but Havens as real as any Haven can be, ruled by gods as real as any god can be. A vast realm of eternity and scattered fortress worlds within it – Havens – like this one. So I just throw a question back at him.

– What about you? I say. Where will *you* go?

He shrugs.

– Maybe the question should be *when*, he says.

– You don't notice how the world keeps changing? says Jack.

It's our fourth – maybe fifth – session and he's starting to really open up, it seems. We're really making progress, digging down into his changeling delusion and the cause of it, why he insists he's not a faery but a graey, stolen at birth from another world, from another fold of this Vellum. They altered him to fit in, he thinks, added the wings and the horns so he didn't look like a freak here. *Or something.* Sometimes it seems so clear, he says, but he keeps forgetting. Like his memory is being fucked with. I've just finished telling him that this kind of denial is as natural as the desire that makes him different from all the other good ole boys – the White Angelo-Satyr Protestants who inhabit most of Midwestern Amorica. It's genetic, I've been telling him; he was born a faery, and all the born-agains and bookthumpers can't change him, shouldn't even try. There's

nothing wrong with his renegade lust, no matter what they say. He doesn't need to be cured.

– Jack, all you have to do is look in a mirror. Look at the glimmer of your eyes, the golden glamour of your skin. You're a faery.

He shakes his head. Condensation on the window of my office, flurrying snow beyond it, the world outside is whitewashed, a blank page.

– Christ, Doc, he says. I wish I knew the word that would wake you, make you realise that you're living in a fucking dreamtime. I'd sing it from the fucking rooftops.

Dead Channels, White Noise

I pull the car over to the side of the road, where the signpost proudly proclaims that we are now entering North Manitu. A picture of a cowboy in denims and checked shirt welcomes us, the archetypal Marlboro man with a lasso looping over his head, eagle wings outstretched behind him. Beyond the sign the landscape is low rolling hills, barren trees and snow.

I lean over the back of the seat.

– Where are we? What does the Book say?

Puck lounges across the back seat, head in Jack's lap, the Book of All Hours open in his own, a joint dangling from his lips.

– Fucked if I know, he says. This thing's gone weird.

Puck turns the Book towards me and I see that it's changed; the pages that once held maps to guide us through this endless Vellum have long since been made illegible by my annotations, but this is new. The annotations squirm and wriggle on the page as if alive. Maybe we should turn back, I think. Try another route. But the clouds rolling in behind us are the grey of wet slate, and there are rumbles in the distance. If we just push on, then with a little luck we might reach a motel before the night comes in, before the Hinter sweeps over us.

– When did it change? I say. How far back?

Puck shakes his head. He looks worried.

– I can't remember. Shit, Guy, I can't remember.

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