

The Infinite Library

There's a man climbing the book stacks, all he's read behind and beneath him, part now of the firmament on which he balances his ladder. He has been a long time climbing, reading as he goes. He remembers it all, no need to down-climb, backtrack, reread. Long as his years of climbing, his recollection of all he's read, hands, eyes and feet all fluency, economy; deft and steady his ascent. He keeps to hard-bound literature. Anthologies and well-read authors make the soundest steps. From time to time he stumbles upon a slim volume of obscure origin, whose weight belies the name. These he carries with him, letting go only when the burden of whispers buckles his legs, sending a tremor through the edifice. Like feathers they drift into darkness, no echo returning to tell of the fall. Even as he climbs, reads, climbs, the stacks grow taller, yet he never tires, each shelf firing his attempt at the next. No lack of oxygen in the bookish air and ever the chance of a fresh breath, something not quite new but sharp enough to raise a gasp, release a sigh. Quiet as a dust mote circulating in a light shaft between the towering stacks he climbs, directed by the voice of every author, accompanied by every character. All his life, it seems, he has been climbing, paragraph by paragraph, page upon page, book stacks growing ahead and behind. Never enough time, never enough light for so much yet unread. Still he climbs, having come so far, unsure now of the way down, knowing how deep the silence that greets the fall.

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