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Midnight Cave, Texas: The Experiment
— For Michel Siffre
Al Zolynas

A man descends into a cave long abandoned by bats. For six months the electrodes and wires of science bristle from his head. in the dark chest of the earth, a hundred feet beneath the seasons and with no clock but the wound timepiece of himself, he seeks his own rhythms. Above him colleagues monitor his vital functions and turn the lights on and off at his request. His dreams, of course, are his own, part of the self’s short-circuit, not to be monitored by the surface crew. After the 130th cycle there are no days), after waking in panic in absolute darkness, he writes, “When you find yourself alone, isolated in a world totally without time, face-to-face with yourself, all the masks that you hide behind—those that preserve your own illusions, those that protect them before others—finally fall, sometimes brutally.”

The man sits on a rock in the circle of light around his pale-blue tent for a succession of eternities swaying mindlessly. He daydreams of the dense jungles of Guatemala, the sunlight filtering through wet leaves. His boyhood fantasy of finding Mayan relics somehow sustains him: “I will go to Central America and I will regain control of my soul.”

On the floor of the cave the dust of ancient bat guano filters, particle by fine particle, through itself.