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Nation

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The following words are culled from certain notebooks discovered beneath a muddied mattress following a domestic violence investigation located at Mr. B’s dwelling. Said investigation was conducted after a neighbor reported loud “thumping” coming from resident’s apartment. Resident was not present upon forcible entry, yet in the absence of victim, investigation has been transferred instead to missing persons. Said person is believed to have had some type of violent encounter preceding his disappearance, as indicated by the level of disarray of dwelling. Notebooks and various items were taken into state’s evidence July 5th, 2003.

Nation

Theatre

After about the space of half an hour, the rust-colored curtain was drawn, and the stage revealed to the viewer’s eye. Conversations waned from the left to the right in tacit respect for the host.

Outside

He’d had the strange impulse lately to commit a crime, a nondescript action of malice. The realm of crime, of course, extends to the more extreme realm of genocide and such atrocities, yet his intuition demanded a course of action on the other end of the spectrum.

This is not to say that he was a stranger to violence, cruelty, actions as old and as true as the sky. All his drinking partners shared a common tension in their right index finger, a condition that he shared with them. Perhaps it would be this finger, whispering gently to him as it twitched that would act as catalyst. After Eritrea, it was hard to say in any definite terms where his intuition would lead him.

He lived simply. The coarse brush so rare in the landscape had chosen his residence to invade, perhaps on the account of excess moisture. A petrol generator drove a salvaged record player in the corner of his shelter, next to the spare muddied mattress. The sole record that he owned, Talking Book, had been injected by the needle so many times as to be nearly unserviceable. Within a year, it would be worthless, except as some nostalgic remembrance of America. I believe that when I fall in love with you it'll be forever. Would have been striking, had there been anyone with whom he could or have any desire to fall in love. In this land, however, love was not qualified. Not listed amongst those things necessary to keep one’s neck clean and untampered with. In short: not needed.

The expatriate colony

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1 Marginalia: 4 mg Clonazepam, 6 oz Single Malt Lowland Scotch, 40 mg Hydrocodone, Winstons
2 Marginalia: [H]lost? Mind is so porous, cannot seem to rid it of all artifice. Becoming more and more difficult to discern the boundary between what has and could have happened. Has any of this taken place in any more than the hypothetical? If all is just how could this become so indeterminate? (sic) Just need simple muscle relaxants. Therein lies all this tension and obscurity.
3 Marginalia: 5.5 mg Clonazepam, 20 mg Olanzapine, 100 mg Trazadone, 12 oz Single Malt Lowland Scotch, Marlboros
4 Marginalia: Why does Stevie Wonder twitch like that? Is this common to all blind people? Just blind Africans? The twitching, giggling exaggerated smile asking, *demanding*, that we “fall in love.” Has Stevie ever killed another man? Would the giggling cease? Would the tics become incessant and overwhelming? Would we have to dose Mr. Wonder with muscle relaxants? Until he’s just a soul in a cage singing beautiful (sic) songs to his self. Have to get out of the house.
5 Marginalia: I am no longer surprised that you of the North do not know how to love, haven’t even an idea of what love is.
6 Marginalia: 4 mg Clonazepam, 12 oz Single Malt Lowland Scotch, 40 mg Hydrocodone, Winstons
The first corner of the room was sparse, not the crowds expected in a hotel with such a breadth of time behind it. The few that hung upon the tables with faces upturned muttered to one another of half-writ histories, spectacles like glass bees falling from their noses, ignoring the plates set before them. Lilies adorned the tables; it was a vital touch within this establishment. As thin as the clientele may have been, management still attempted to provide such luxuries.

An old professor, lifting his liver-spotted fingers shouted of gelding those tomes with which he was currently in meelee. Blood is not now shed, has not been shed in this room for ages, is substituted by ink, but a pallid rose-colored hue nonetheless covered the threadbare carpet in ancient spots, not washed in centuries.

The colony was on its last legs; the management gauging this by a plethora of sigils. Meals went untouched, the gaming parlor unused in a decade. Owls on rooftops (terrible to those savage women dressed as waiters) seemed to anticipate a soon demise at the worst, migration at best. Neither translated well, in business terms, for the players involved, though a general silence had become the norm, which the host found to his liking.

The professor coughed, expectorating a cancerous-looking object that stained his papers with its touch.

As if trying to explain away this sudden illness, a man protested that the fish had gone rotten. The lumbering attendants paid no heed, but in fact carted the entirety of entrees reserved for the opposite corner to these men. Taken aback, aghast, ashamed, the guests rocked in their chairs, creating tremors in the thinly carpeted floor of the room that could be felt even in the distances of such locations as the lobby or the kitchen. They seemed to have forgotten that their illness was a constant.

The women were aflutter as the dishes, consumed or not, were swept away and coffee was served. When implored for cream or sugar, the attendants muttered that coffee is bitter, and any attempt to disguise the favor is either futile or dishonest. The guests assumed these savages lack appreciation for the finer nuances; all pastoral sentiments aside, the attendants looked upon the guests only with disdain, not the awe anticipated by the guests.

Desert

The thin and alien woods had broken their constricting grasp over the landscape, and the rickshaw of sorts now entered a relatively rarified space; the horrible grinding of the travois had ceased. After rising, the white man deliberated openly to himself over the proper tip to give the man. After all, to physically drag a man four kilometers over the haggard road passed off as high-way was a feat more deserving of a mere fifteen percent. Altogether, The white man leaned towards generosity and decided to match the demanded price. Five quid, and that had included a carton of John Players (ubiquitous in this part of the globe), as well as three pages from a magazine of white women in jeopardizing poses. Looking at the man’s dirty, bleeding feet, the white man finally handed the man ten pounds and sent him on his way. The man exposed bright charred teeth in response, green sinews of qat overtaking his teeth as vines do brick.

Seeing the speed at which the man lifted the haphazard travois and his eager, scrappy motions forced the white man to think about the nature of charity. He had either fed that man’s family for a year or fed his addiction for a fortnight. Fucking third world government; this was bread and circus squared. Cubed. A hyper-bread and circus. Fucking qat; at least it gets things done. For a time.

The man soon was sprinting back towards the city with unnatural energy (possibly fear), leaving the white man alone in an alien land. Lifting his rucksack from the road and ensuing cloud of dust, he began to walk in the prescribed southerly direction.
The white man had been airlifted via some ghastly behemoth that, as a bumblebee, should not have been able to fly. His transportation was necessarily shoddy, as he was not employed by church, nor state, but a wholly different organization, with wholly different (read: lesser) coffers. This agency, bearing an obscure Italian name, deemed themselves purveyors of truth, and nothing much more than that for them (the unexamined life, and all...). To take any action to any end was extremely peculiar. With only a thread of explanation of his assignment, the white man accepted this anomalous contract, with only a silken thread of explanation for his own motive. Since his landing, a date which he could not recall any longer, he had been moving in search of the Exemplaire. And that was the summary of the white man's' understanding of his situation.

History 1 (Near)

The country itself was one in which the sole natural (and salable) resource was salt. Salt derived from the ocean. Given the kilometers of coastline throughout the globe, the nation was far from having a stranglehold on the market. Other natural resources included a few goats, dirt, flies, and the relentless “generosity” of the French. The white man's' views on issues such as welfare were embryonic, to put it nicely, but he'd always prided himself on calling a spade a spade. The French, spurned in the loss of empire, revealed in taking steps to be “progressive,” and funneled meager amounts of money to the nation. Perhaps it was atonement, but it just appeared to the white man as a different level of imperialism. There is power in philanthropy; whether it’s a grand masturbatory effort or an attempt to cleanse oneself in front of God, it continues the enslavement. Instead of chains, the government produced qat and hunger into a vitriolic cycle that had but two recourses: sorrow or submission.

In this country, a nation that God had evidently forgotten, hopefully only a momentary, though epochal, lapse, the white man had extremely simple business, an assignment he felt below his ability. Kilometers passed tediously, and the white man longed for the quasi-luxury of the travois as he traversed series of lead grey and rock punctuated by the brightest hues of green he'd ever encountered. Everything appeared deranged or deformed in this country: waves crashed upon the shore in a method unique to this land. Strange birds sang odd melodies and flew in patterns unseen in the West. The simplicity and wretchedness of the food balanced by the sweetness of the bread (the French had left behind one blessing, in this department alone) further added to his disorientation in this land.

History 2 (Far)\(^8\)

The Americans had come, airlifted in the finest of silver birds, under the pretense of training the dark man and his comrades. Typical American self-aggrandizing, not unlike the French. What could a man living in Hollywood who had only fired at paper targets teach these men, bloody hands and all? There were still the occasional regular who had his American certification neatly tacked to his wall, but this was a rarity; most had used the paper to start fires or other practical purposes.\(^9\)

And the French had left them behind, yes, embraced them nominally, but it was in that weakened state that his state had been attacked. More blood had been shed in that year than a decade had seen rain. Blood will never fertilize fields nor feed the livestock. What little remains.

Inside, once more\(^10\)

From across the room, in the corner of gentlemen left hungry, henceforth referred to as the

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\(^8\) Marginalia: 5.5 mg Clonazepam, 20 mg Olanzapine, 100 mg Trazadone, 4 oz Single Malt Lowland Scotch, Marlboros

\(^9\) Marginalia: A purpose this notebook and these words will, I am certain, serve one day.

\(^10\) Marginalia: 4 mg Clonazepam, 6 oz Single Malt Lowland Scotch, 40 mg Hydrocodone, Winstons
second corner, a man arose. Balding, graying, suit frayed and moth eaten, he adjusts his double Windsor while exclaiming to the entire company, “In usual situations, I detest this sort of thing, as I believe a true patriot should not live in the past.” The apathetic guests toyed with their spoons, unsure of their coffee, divorced from the monologue. “Yet,” the man continued, “having once been a captain in the naval forces of our common nation, I feel compelled to take charge of this dreadfully stifling situation. If it is exodus we seek, I shall begin by appointing brevet lieutenants.”

To those foolhardy enough to lend him the contact of their gaze, they were rewarded with such commissions, and reacted by withdrawing said gaze upon recognition. Those in the third corner who had been unwittingly awarded this dubious title scoffed and bellowed through their cassocks, chortling through mouthfuls of fish squirreled away from the removing hands of the attendants (It was, after all, a Friday). The league conversed in hushed and raspy tones amongst each other before throwing down their napkins in protest and retiring to their cloistered rooms. As each passed by the maitre d’ (another lumbering brute, albeit much better dressed) each requested that their evening meals be served upstairs, and received an affirmative nod in response. One by one, the footsteps of the saints landed upon the worn floor, and the echoes trailed up the stairwell, through the hallways, until dissipating as each was delivered to his quarters.

The aged captain cried in pursuit, “Do you even remember the motherland? Can you remember the tongue of its waters? Do you really wish to die an expatriate in this terrible country?” The answer to his questions lay still in the gradually softening footsteps, and was furthered by the silence from the remaining corner of the room.

Illumination

As night fell, the dark man walked the decrepit road, occasionally glancing at the tell-tale oil trails being absorbed into the dirt. His face, or at times his back, was illuminated at times by various passing vehicles, at times sending him into the nearby ditches, confusing the bright lights with flares. To the drivers, he must appear as a ghost, though Issas walking barefoot in the night was anything but a rarity. The oil trails, like blood, were sigils leading him to his destination: the Oran Hotel.

As a boy, he was told stories of the hotel, home to expatriated Caucasians, rotting in its carpenter gothic interior. Though he never could attribute anything definitively, it was sure that their dealings were of the perverse and in part contributed to the wars; sometime they added even the long intervals between vegetation. Aside from a small military presence, they were the sole whites left in the nation.

Enough time for reflection; the dark man climbed from the ditch and followed the patterns of oil once more.

Inside

The gentlemen of the second corner eyed the fourth, involving them through their gaze, begging an answer to the captain’s mast. Bound by Hippocrates, and other troublesome oaths taken in their youth, they searched through their expansive yet crumbling memories and recalled their collective vocation. Grudgingly, they staved off the apathy that was so inherent to this room, and gathered whatever items lay upon the table. Various scopes and corroding instruments were itemized and returned to torn white pockets, and soon the fourth corner became the fourth column, covered at the entrance to the foyer.

Similarly transmuted were those of the first corner through some internal yet uninspired

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11 Marginalia: 6 mg Clonazepam, 40 oz King Cobra Malt Liquor, Lucky Strikes
12 Marginalia: 4 mg Clonazepam, 6 oz Single Malt Lowland Scotch, 40 mg Hydrocodone, Winstons
hand, having aligned themselves alongside the fourth, tomes in hand, dust accordingly spilling to the sullen carpet. The members of the second quickly foraged for any foodstuffs taken by the attendants, stagnant or not, yet the barking of the captain, whose posture had begun to stiffen somewhat, drove them into form, and they soon lined up alongside the other two ranks.

The captain appointed an emissary, as it were, to mount the failing stairwell and summon what would complete their company; the diminutive recipient hobbled by means of a cane, and did not return to the room for about the space of half an hour.

Upstairs

The "emissary," a man who appeared broken and subsequently mended several times over his life, reached a gnarled hand to the equally gnarled wood of the lead cloister's door. Somehow, he suspected, the saints were in league with the attendants. The savage, dark women were never referred to as "brutes," but indiscernible terms, tragedienne at times, cheveleuse at others.

Qat Breeds Genet

The time fleeting, the grey dust of the "highway" absorbing more and more impact, he reluctantly pitched into his pocket as retrieved the clear bag that shone with an emerald hue. The white man had places to go, and whilst he was strongly cautioned against "going native" by his superiors, every second counted. The savages may have lacked the cultural nuances of his brethren, yet they spared no time. Pausing his pace, the green wad of leaves and stems found its way to his cheek. At least it gets things done. Waited for the crazy look in his eyes and... step, step, step as conical clouds rose behind each footprint, marking his path aerially, like flameless roman candles.

In this hyper-lucid state the man covered good ground, though distance at the moment seemed arbitrary. Once crashed, tent is pitched, wood gathered, teapot readied. He had not been one, at school, known as a master of the brewing of tea. Tea is bitter, he thought, and though there may be gradients to this, none transcend Bitterness. He learned this at a hotel in which he had boarded during one of his travels through another disturbing nation. Yet, as qat wears off, it is a wise idea to supplant the one chemical with caffeine. The addition of one of the arsenal of John Players added to the acceleration of the white man's heartbeat in an otherwise rarified landscape.

The sheer joy he felt in this dilapidated land! The blackness of his contemporaries' skin (that dark black not seen in the West), the placement of pain as just another transient detail, that men wear skirts and walk barefoot among the rocks. Children wholly allow the flies to sip on their tears, without a second thought, make resounding whooping sounds with their chapped mouths and calloused hands. Wiping their constant companions (flies) away could lead to a break in the songs they perpetually sing. From an encampment far over the horizon, their voices carried in the arid space.

So songs began, and his lips tentatively followed suit.

My patience is a medal pinned to your lapel.
With your sunstruck face you re as shadowy as a Gypsy.

Just a night's sleep, closer to the fire, would set the man right. Would exorcise this tendency to

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13 Marginalia: 5.5 mg Clonazepam, 20 mg Olanzapine, 100 mg Trazadone, 4 oz Single Malt Lowland Scotch, Marlboros, pencil lead
14 Ibid
15 "Ma patience est une médaille à ton revers..." Jean Genet's Le Pêcheur du Suquet, to Lucien Senemaud
“go native,” as so many of his predecessors had. His destination lay not twenty kilometers to the South; he pondered the distance as his head lay upon the rucksack soiled with Africa, a makeshift pillow, another reminder of home (though back on the continent, pillows were not generally filled with the acute edges of books). His books tethered him to a culture seeming more and more foreign every day. If fate would only smile upon him, lend him a comforting mirage, he could find an overloaded pickup truck, colorful with religious streamers and deities painted on the sides, to jump on. Driver, madness in his yellowed eyes would drop him off closer to his destination.

Fruition

And said mirage did come to fruition. Ou allez-vous? the Somali driver asked in bad French, reddened eyes, telltale wad of green resting in his lip. Salle d’Exemplaire, the white man replied, Hôtel d’Oran, looking up at the ghost-truck.

Oui, allez ict, returned the driver, slowly, eyes abuzz, staring at a space twenty meters beyond the white man. A swaddled baby, yellowed eyes contrasting his white teeth, was crying, mouth agape, in the cab. Bébé, fermes la bouche! chastised the mother, eyes bagged and reclined ungracefully in the cab as well. Most distasteful, as Burroughs would put it. No matter, the cabin was not an option to begin with. The white man stretched his reddened and weathered arms to grasp the flat bed, heaving himself and his equipment to a reclining position. He picked out stray qat from his teeth that had defied the coffee and hours, spat over the side, and relished the aftertaste. The credits rolled, as he once put it.

The pickup roared, clouds of dust rising, and the rickety truck lurched forward. Oblivious to the alien drama unfolding within the cab, and praising the sound-absorbing qualities of glass, he looked above to the dirty sky, and thought of youths and liquors. The bouncing of the truck became first rhythmic and then soothing, luring the white man into a realm of sleep he had not encountered in weeks.

The passing landscape was as far from his country as he could possibly get. Grass supplanted by gravel, rolling trees replaced by arid shrubs sounding their death knell. The occasional goats peppered the otherwise muddy brown of the desert, though the shade of the goats’ fur was not far from that of the dirt. But these observations, collected over two and a half kilometers, were intermittent, concluded in the short spaces of time that punctuated his sleep.

Village

A kilometer from the border, he awoke to find the truck idling in a desolated village. Roofs were wanting throughout the development; only foundations and stone walls perhaps two feet in height signified living arrangements, property. Oddly, the cab had been vacated and there was no trace of his dark-skinned benefactors. Nor, for that matter, was there a sign of anyone in this village. Had it not been for the frequency that the white man had encountered this type of “architecture,” he would have assumed that said site was either an A) ghost town, or B) nuclear test site. A thin wisp of smoke rising from one of these structures led him to the “entrance” to a dark, incomplete, grey hovel, housing a dozen crazy-eyed men, huddling over some mysterious object. Scores of prescription bottles, with American inscriptions, lined the walls like carpenter gothic molding, the amber hues casting light upon the corners of the hovel. The eldest of the men, hands trembling with age, rose and approached the intruder. Earthenware, filled with a tepid water was handed to the visitor, visibly dehydrated and worse for the journey. The war liq-

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16Marginalia: 5.5 mg Clonazepam, 20 mg Olanzapine, 100 mg Trazadone, 4 oz Single Malt Lowland Scotch, Marlboros
17Marginalia: 5 mg Clonazepam, 20 mg Olanzapine, 100 mg Trazadone, 4 oz Single Malt Lowland Scotch, Marlboros
uid tastes opaque as it runs down his throat, chalky with an undertone of iron. *C'est l'eau de les dieux*, creaked from the lips of the old man. Surely, it must have been; the world that God forgot has not had to suffer through fluoridation and filtration. The irony of it all.

*Ou est la salle d'Exemplaire?* asked The white man, wiping the residue from his grainy stubble, satisfied. Was this the dawn of that notorious process, of “going native?”

*Ah!* was the reply, *c est un et demi kilos sud.* Reluctantly, *je marcherai avec toi, si tu vieux.*

The old Somali’s French is as poor as mine, the white man thought in relief. *Merci.* In gratitude, the white man retrieved his deteriorating green sack of qat and offered it to the man. The old man’s weathered, black face cursorily examined the bag, subsequently spit on the ground, and produced a bundle wrapped in plastic, hue brighter than emeralds, not to mention The white man’s supply, slipping into a slimy brown. The pair’s faces became synonymous as the plant touched their cheeks; murderous, violent, still, reserved. Lighting two John Players, handing one to his patriarchal companion, the white man stepped into the suddenly alien woods, like an apparition, riding the rising tide of qat and nicotine.

*Exemplaire*\(^1\)

Beneath the wrought-iron gate, inscription in blacksmithed letters, *L Oran,* the structure itself was fair, reminiscent of any revival abbey, an assemblage of parts of styles both European and local. Strange, unworlthy iconography adorned the walls, faces of deities whose features were reflected in the attendants shown through the stained glass. Led upstairs by a young girl, he noticed that scratching had crept from the depths of the damp hall, approaching the envoy. As the scratching noise grew, motion was manifested as shadows alighting upon the hallway, and the rickshaw man who had so diligently served the white man slowly crept from the depths of the hall, abess reclined upon the same makeshift travois. This must be one of the *tragediennes,* one of the *cheveleuses* that he had been told of.\(^2\)

A veritable color guard, dark burnt women, had escorted the Exemplar to the white man’s desk, and looked to him as if they had plans to stay. Implored as to whether they could perhaps leave their assault rifles behind (AKMs, folding stock Kalashnikovs), nary a glance was returned to the man. That military yet religious stillness overtook the room, a stillness leading to the white man being unable to focus on the task at hand. The less the dark-skinned guard moved, the white man’s’ attention became all the more unraveled. What had originated as strong will and determinacy had become annoyance and ennui.\(^3\)

*Exodus*\(^4\)

This time was punctuated by the soft tread of those once recalcitrant, and the reluctant men filed into the room, looking shamefully to the floor; it had become apparent to these men what power they served. Four corners had become four columns, and the attendants stood bemused by the guests’ geometry.

“Long enough, then,” cried the captain, brandishing a carving knife in lieu of a sword. The

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\(^{1}\) Marginalia: 240 mg Dextromethorphan Hydrobromide, Camel Non-Filters
\(^{2}\) Marginalia: *Les Tragediennes, Les Cheveleuses.* Those who will walk with me, arm in arm. Eventually.
\(^{3}\) Marginalia: It is at this final point at which the author must make a note. Reaching the terminal point at which the author feels compelled to erase the lines, nay, go at the hard cover with a hammer, it dawned upon him that he has become the fifth column. All the time searching for the fifth column within the narrative: Who should fill the role? What purpose do they seek? Shall I plug him one? It is but I, not even the hotel’s proprietor, who act clandestinely to damage the goals of all players involved. At times, the only viable method of liberating fictional entities is euthanasia. But the author lacks the fortitude to fulfill his own motives. Therefore he must fulfill his own.
\(^{4}\) Marginalia: 4 mg Clonazepam, 6 oz Single Malt Lowland Scotch, 40 mg Hydrocodone, Winstons
command given, the waiters gave no resistance, and the long march was begun. No alert was placed to the host or proprietors, and the company exited as quietly as they have once remained. Through the grand entrance hall, the sympathetic bellhops (after all, just young girls) attempted to aid the more stricken of the gentlemen to the door, yet sloughed off the formation like scabs as they exited. 22

Four Columns 23

Rust-colored curtains were cast apart from a yellowed window atop the hotel, from behind which the management peered at the exodus, whilst engaging a dark, dried man in discussion. The glare of the sun prevented any of the company’s members from noting this event. In this bright midday light, the procession was cast upon the background as they moved in high contrast, that of a typeface. A flag, details obscured, was alighted from pole over one forms’ shoulder, the figures moved in search of the nation in which they tread, escaping the bitter taste in their own mouths.

Yet, 24

The abbess and the white man abandoned the Exemplaire where it lay, as the cry broke loose from the outside. The two rushed to the window in time to witness the light swallowing up the ranks of the elderly. Just in time to witness the light embrace the gate and gables. The Exemplaire cooked, then its pages burned in the massive heat, and was lost to all time.

And, 25

The dark man stalled momentarily on the ostensible roadway, constricted by a sudden density in the air. Proud Hassan26 looked at the position of the sun, notes the size and angle from the horizon, and placed his forehead upon the dirt, in time to miss that flash of light that engulfed the city that lay ahead of him. He did, however, revel in what he took for a message from The God, that in the midst of prayer, he felt the incredible warmth of His presence.

Theatre 27

The stage became opaque and audiences were rushed away by burly men. Attendees, threatened, rushed to their vehicles in the adjacent lots, provided free of charge to ticket-holders, courtesy of the management, who still attempted to provide such luxuries.

After Mr. B.’s disappearance, personal effects including notebooks were returned to B.’s family, who subsequently burnt most everything burnable, though a sympathetic neighbor spirited away the preceding pages. That neighbor, a Ms. Ayers, described the incident as, “a real torching, as if they were trying to strip anything left of him from their minds. Oh, he was an [expletive], all right, but he still deserved to be remembered, to still exist.” 28

22 Marginalia: They file through the mouth of the hotel. I’m beginning to feel like a human ouroboros. Thank god for the son of sugar; he makes the medicine, and the tale (sic) go down.
23 Marginalia: 4 mg Clonazepam, 6 oz Single Malt Lowland Scotch, 4 mg Hydrocodone, Winstons, plaster of paris
24 Yet...
25 And...
26 Marginalia: God have mercy on him.
27 Marginalia: Biting my nails now. Down to the quick. Further, even.