

A Temple is not a Dwelling-house

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Hey you know what, Jawad, I would not have done that. Better yet, come back over. Check out my birdshit-speckled Volvo 240, secondhand from the late 1970's, about the time you were born. People around here believe that when it rains, bugs come into your house. The corduroy March breeze flits through the open windows. Across the street, a quinceñera-style birthday party romps along, massive speakers and a bouncy castle and you can taste the barbacoa. I bought a sack of dented beers and they're cold as snow in Russia. Springsteen's *Born to Run* is on the platter — *The circuit's lined and jammed with chromed invaders*. Come back over and we can listen to records, you bobbing your fermented hair all in dark twines. A black mangle of wire jutting out or up or over, all from your head, framing that half grin and solace, like you're eavesdropping 24/7, an all-hearing, effervescent, full-of-every-lifeform being. How do you like that, Jawad, you being an atheist and all?

Today is 16 July, the seventeenth year of the second millennium after Christ's violent death, amen. Seven years ago, Carmine and I were stuck at Schönefeld Airport. We were halfway through our month-long trip. Morning flight. Berlin to Dublin, easy like a drink. After a series of German-natured disruptions, we arrived at our gate as it was about to close. We'd made it, ha yes. "No, no, no," the attendant told us, "boarding terminated at 13:20. It is now 13:23." But the door is still open.

It was no good, Jawad, she had a knack for rules — you know the stereotype about Germans and guidelines ("der train is late if it's only five minutes early"). She repeated her answer as she backed down the hallway and onto the plane. So we were

already furious when we got the news from my dad that you'd been living on our couch since we left. The taxis pissed by. Nude sunbathers spread across towels on the lawn. And when I heard the news, I looked up right as a man was bending over to adjust his towel, two giant balls peeking through his legs. The same deadness as your two eyes. Because, damn you, Jawad, your bad news has a sinister presence.

When disasters struck you — and they struck you quite often — no one around you was spared. In fact, the first responders tended to suffer far worse than you ever suffered. Like, there I was, life already making me a jackass, and your “fuck you” gets delivered in a hippy's ballsack. And you crossed yourself with those fingers? Don't you know God is a triangle?

Your career as a soul music DJ had taken off, this is true. You collected girlfriends like a hunter collects rare pelts and severed paws. Anytime a girlfriend kicked out you, you sloped to the gay bars and danced with men who grabbed like a butcher. It was a David Bowie view of love.

Jawad, there are people who are talking and it has a lot to do with you. They're saying that you vanished for good. Of course, if I hear it, I spit at the ground. Spit right into ground — not literally, of course ... but I certainly ask questions ... Because, Jawad, no one can talk about you around me. Even if you were a deadbeat.

I mean, we were no slobs, Jawad.

No. We were not the slobs.

Although, you have to admit that you were definitely slob-like.

These are facts that I mostly endorse.

The afternoon my dad stopped by what he expected to be our empty apartment and found you in the front room, windows draped so tightly he said it felt darker than anything he'd seen or felt — “darker than a Donegal funeral in the bog of the goddamn winter” — you rattled awake full of half-slurs and emergency banter, your wispy thighs like two rotten cactuses as you jostled our couch. A putter of light sank onto white underwear, stained from all angles.

Looking down at you, my dad had queasy suspicions. He knew you were our friend, that you'd been living with Reyna downstairs. He liked Reyna. But he had heard Carmine mention your name with suspicion. “Something something steals our good plates...” What he saw was rubble, dead drift, garbage. You were a failure, Jawad. He'd seen men like this before — he'd even been worn down like that himself — so he knew the dangers and severances notwithstanding. My father who'd spent every spare childhood moment at the small-town Ireland cinema watching American detectives and cowboys, he knew how to stay calm, calm long enough so the criminal broke.

Dad: Ah Jaysus, Jawad. Have you wandered into the wrong apartment? What are you snoring here for? You know they've gone away for the month.

Jawad: Mr. Ryan . . . What time is it?

Dad: Time for me to be collecting the key. That one.

Jawad: Wha?

Dad: Jawad, why are you here?

Jawad: The neighbors — the cops came because they were fighting, the girl with the green dreads and her coke dealer squeeze — and they were shouting so loud and

he came out and started to bang on our door so I ran out the back and up the back stairs and found the key and —

You spigotted longer but no one wants to hear that.

Eventually, you and my dad winged into what he described as “a lovely conversation.” It was a “nice chat.” With funny moments and “insights.”

Beside you lay records and beer cans, as desiccated as your views on immigration, both legal and otherwise.

Dad: Jaysus, man, pour us a drink from that bottle there, take it down in one go, then gather everything around you that belongs to you. Everything else, it's no longer yours.

My father described the poignant moment when you shrank toward the turntable and collected your bracelets and t-shirts from the waist-high bookshelf you'd been using as a locker. You tried to take the \$200 cartridge off the tone arm — it cost you three weeks of dishwashing at a vegan spot in Montrose — but my dad shook his head, “We'll call that your rent pay.”

Your own father, a man who had a gift for predicting the housing market in Houston for three decades — “This place gonna get big” — and who was by all accounts an impossible man to get a check from, has been dead long enough that you can make it a day without that feeling. The strafing pause in your beer belly as you remember. Which almost always starts as a memory — the time he bought you that skull made of sugar all painted bright colors, a Calavera, in Mexico City when you were 10 and you licked the paint and sugar in the shape of your name. People have all different sayings about life, but you reckoned that the ones about death are stupid,

dumb like haikus and skim milk and commercials. All those people dead for so long, it's a wonder any of us can get naked in front of a mirror without laughing. That there, the bump you're poking, it connected the pipeline from mother to you. I suspect you rated the womb as ideal.

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Jawad, remember the way you lied? The day a couple weeks before we left for our trip, when I was locked out of my apartment, and you said you hadn't the vaguest idea where the spare key to my and Carmine's apartment was — you could not find the blue key. The backup. The scrawny metal emblem of trust.

Ah and I could smell the muddy stink of lie in your voice. The puttering stammer to your assurances. Suddenly, you had empathy. And when you tried to shoulder me in, I thought, "Go on, you fuck, hand at my shoulder, I know you're only feeling for a tender spot to knife and knife."

A week before that, I told you, Jawad, between chomps of grilled pork Bahn Mi from Cafe TH, I said, "You can't stay at our place while we're gone."

"Ah, tío, Carmine's directive, no?"

That solemn shake no. The appetizer arrived after the entrée, and a hurricane was pouting, dark and unsure, through the murk south of Jamaica.

"No problem," you said. There were shredded noodles stuck to our table. You pouted of course, but shrugged into a quote by Dime Bag Daryl. Something about how life is a matter of what comes afterward, of what comes from vacuums and spiders and dirt. You said life is a matter of what settles on its own. People constantly misunderstand each other. Like the time on the light rail, barely past midnight, when the

young guy dressed up like Sid Vicious turned to the elderly black man beside him, and asked “Hey man where’s the Punk scene at around here?” The man, jabbered, said, “Punk scene? Why you asking me? I look like a punk or what? Answer is no, not me, no, no, not punk ... Well, then, I mean, the punks, they hang out mostly in Montrose.” You laughed hard, with your hand on your mall-ninja blade — you were always so jumpy after that guy chased you down Shepherd with a golf club. The young punk and the elderly man smiled, two completely different people who mistakenly felt concord. You saw what they couldn’t see: The young kid wanted to go somewhere with music that justified his anarchy tattoos, that’s what “punk” meant to him. For the elderly man, “punk” was derogatory term for “gay” and “scene” was what happened when the lights were off.

As you plumped to Reyna’s through the night humidity, you told yourself that a punk can go so many places. You only wore black clothing, like a perpetual mourner, and it’s like the fabric grew into your hair and your eyes. You had dark skinner but everything else was darker.

The truth, the truth is — if you want to know, I’ll say it — you never gave me back some of my favorite albums.

TO WIT:

Kraftwerk - *Trans-Europe Express*

Fennesz – *Endless Summer*

Steve Reich – *Music for 18 Musicians*

My Bloody Valentine – *Loveless*

Muddy Waters – *Electric Mud*

Black Dice – *Creature Comforts*

There are more. Each time how you knocked on the door in a panic, “Yo I’ve got a set tonight and I gotta practice something new or they’ll figure out how I do it.”

The one I always missed was *Loveless*.

“Nah, tio,” you, reading this, would say. “No respect. You didn’t even own half them albums. They beyond you. You’re just looking for a way to sneak a list of some of your favorite vinyls into one of your stories so you can show off what you think is solid music, but it ain’t even close. Where’s the Autechre? The Madlib? Where’s Throbbing Gristle? How come no 808 State? Chaka Khan? Moondog? And that’s just off my head? Plus I paid for those bastard twenty times over — remember the \$300 cartridge I gave you? The David Bowie swag? All the Lone Stars and Pabst Blue Ribbons? Any way it doesn’t matter.”

If I were you, I would never argue with a man who turns out to be right. It gets stubborn the longer you bluff. By the end, you’re just two speed bumps in a republic of lies.

Which is why I’ll never tell anyone about the day you rushed upstairs and banged on the door till I opened it. I hadn’t known you that long and it was the first time I’d seen you desperate. You rushed in, your black skinny jeans half open. Gripping belt loops with one hand and Reyla’s laptop with the other, you paced around the room, saying, “I’m fucked — I’m fucked — hijo de puta.” Then, suddenly blank, “You got to help me, tio.” You opened the laptop like a clam. The room stank like Vaseline and cigarette smoke and it was miserably pubic. You nearly always stank like burning horse waste.

Next door, the dominatrix was pounding through a session, an Indian gentleman in a tidy pinstripe suit.

“See?”

The computer screen was a minefield of porn ads. In the middle, a gasping white warning with the FBI logo. “They got me — it was a mistake, I swear to you. I don’t look at kids, I swear, it was a fuckin mistake is all. Shit, I know what it does when you finger with kids.” A string of words that you read aloud ten times before I could stop you: “THIS DEVICE HAS BEEN LOCKED BY THE US GOVERNMENT DUE TO ILLEGAL PORNOGRAFY OF UNDERAGE MINORS. FBI IS COMING CEASE AND DESIST.”

In Spanish, “malware” means the same thing, it just sounds different when you say it so you have to say it on repeat. “You mean someone did this to fuck with me?”

“Definitely.” I add that the internet loves wicked corruption.

After three cans of Miller High Life you calmed down, then we watched Atletico Madrid play Chelsea in the Champion’s League. Formations of white and blue like a flock of speckled geese. The field had patterns and zigs. The groundcrew water the field for the thirty minutes before kickoff. It makes the ball slippery. The game faster. The tackles more dangerous. After Chelsea scored a goal, you mumbled about “the dope times — I mean, it’s practically blood sport but more of a strategy.” Soccer is a game of space and time, you concluded. The more space you can wrangle, the less you need to worry about time. The more time you can muster, the clearer your path and the nearer a goal. But you have to fight for both like a wounded opossum battling for survival, through pain and failure and sometimes disgrace. Like most sports, like much of life, it gets more intense the higher up you go. At the international level, any pain or failure

automatically becomes humiliation — you grip to the roof of your career like hell. If you can wrestle enough space to remain hanging and enough time to stay young, you might discover what tocks the whole thing. Half-time and all the loud advertisements. Midway through a Heineken commercial, you burped out some beer gas and ranted about Joy Division. They were the opposite of Elvis, how they played with their backs to the crowd.

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When Carmine and I finally made it back to Houston from Berlin, you were gone. We found beer cans in one of the closets and wads of rolling papers moused into sad, lonesome places. No one in Montrose could say where. All your social media accounts were unattended. For months. We assumed you were on one of your voyages along Scott Street, Houston's most murder-prone area. Or maybe you'd fucked off down to Mexico. After a while, the world you inhabited sank over the parts with your imprint.

Then thirty minutes past midnight on January 1st of the new year, guess which of your ex-girlfriends knocked on our door?

"Reyla!" Carmine shouted, as Reyla, in a black-gilt cocktail dress and heels, slurred hello, poking a finger into the muscular man beside her. He swayed like a drunk ox in his cottonblue suit.

"Guys — this is Ignacio — he's (hiccup) from," looking at him to make sure she got it right, "ON-Du-Rass," a drunk nod. "Are we bothering you? We thought we'd come upstairs to watch the ball drop for happy new year in New York Square."

Carmine, with a smile: "Like my mother always told me, 'Sit your ass down!'" So they sat arch-backed and proper on the couch you had spent so many slobbering hours

clung to. I suspected you'd groped the pillows — you were always the type fond of smothering.

“Have some Cristal,” I told them, holding a bottle of cut-rate Andre, orange sale sticker \$3.99 and all.

Carmine told Reyla about our trip and I gabbed with Ignacio from Honduras.

“Yes, yes,” he said, “but I moved to Spain when I was a teen-ayer.”

“Where in Spain?”

“Madrid.”

“Ohhh, Mahreedth?” I said. “Joder!”

“Joder, eh? You know the Spain, eh? Berry nice.” He started talking rapid Spanish, but when I shook my head he stumbled back to English.

“Why were you in Spain?” I asked.

“Futbol, tío, futbol. I played for the Real Mah-reed youth teams, then I go to Italia and play — I play for Seria B, and I didn't do nothing but play futbol all my life until I break my knee, then come to America.”

His Roman face betrayed his labored speaking. Eyes gold with an intensity of blue. The man had gravitas, Jawad. Even drunk, he had fucking gravitas.

Then Reyla said your name to Carmine.

“Where is Jawad,” I interrupted.

“Mexico,” Reyla whispered. “His mom is dying. Cancer,” then she pointed to the worse place to have cancer.

The words left a hollow desperation in the air.

“More wine?”

Outside, the glitter of shopping carts shook by. New year out there, too. Before the neighborhood took a gentrified kick to the teeth, the bums around there treated dirty syringes like Kleenexes. You could see pharmacy-logged needles anywhere. Crosswalks, backyards, parks — fanged dog turds that could poison your blood. More nuisance than outbreak, depressing to see. Most crime came from dealers, not junkies, who tended to just killed themselves slowly right there in front of you.

Then we saw you that February at Avante Garden and you looked like yourself, only sad, only taller — the black outfit: black tight pants, black Sunn0))) t-shirt, black snake skin boots. A tallboy of Lone Star in each hand. The giddiness of your eyes.

“Colega!” you shouted. We hugged. You smelled awful.

The beer garden was crowded with the Experimental Jazz Thursday crowd, so stringy people in Wayfarers were bumping into each other or scating fancy words. We hugged again, deeply, and as you pulled back, you whispered, “Say, you got an enough cash for us both to get drunk?”

I remember how often you asked me that, Jawad. I was fifteen years younger than you and you never had money. A church with no damn congregation, no anything at all.

We stole to a corner and everyone else faded off, and I drank and listened to you talk: “I’m staying positive, tío, got to stay on the positive vibe, no neggy nancy over here, chaval, good that has to come, it’s there, even when it ain’t.” Then, after pausing as a firetruck passed: “Most of life happens to us. It happens and happens, without us knowing. Most of our own lives are strange to ourselves ... All I know is, I don’t believe in God, but maybe in my next life I’m a fish of some kind.”

Will there ever be anyone else like you, Jawad? Anyone else who dug through the people that cared until they were forced to stop caring? All the people who believed in your strange life despite all of your bad choices. You never got your driver's license, in all your 38 years. I tried teaching you to drive, for a while. You liked walking. You strutted from place to place in your checkered snake-skin boots and as you wandered around, you dreamt you were in a Depeche Mode video or a David Lynch movie.

Jawad, you called addicts "opie-punks" and occasionally did some backroom blow. You had a secretive approach to drugs. I never knew when, what, or how much. You drank whiskey till you fell over and occasionally the police knocked on Reyna's door and sighed and told you to go upstairs and stay with your friends till you got sober. You loved faking ailments for the Tramadol, maybe some Xanax, depending on how well you jarred your heartrate. You were always a contrarian, so when the opioid crisis played death across America you took up heroin with a shrug.

On a whim, you bought a packet of the tacky cheap shit. From the corner store owner with the wooden teeth, the one we called "Yahway." Reyla was gone for the week, so you snuck into her apartment. Nobody saw when your hands shook as you lit the aluminum foil pipe over the toilet. You hated the smell and the vapory way the air moved. You passively observed the Serge Gainsbourg record orbiting on the turntable — you only cared about Gainsbourg because he "slobbered on Bardot and I was made for that chick, I mean it." It felt like OxyContin. You could feel the deadliness in you. Outside, an ambulance carted off the grumpy crossdresser, the one across the street, for the third time that month. A Mexican family skated along with their shopping cart — half groceries, half children, like you used to do as a kid. The upstairs neighbor had a

client, you could hear her spanking the guy repeatedly. You tried to laugh about it — that a literal whore was running a BDSM service right above you, how one day, a tow truck parked out front, with a car harnessed to the back of it, and the driver went upstairs and howled as the dominatrix filled his ass with blue gelatin. But every time you tried to laugh all you could do was slobber. And you remember that these apartments are single bedroom, so every time the dominatrix had a client, she made her 13-year-old son go into the bedroom and wait. A father figure appeared infrequently. He had a recovering alcoholic's stutter and always talked about what was definitely a cult.

Hell and other people, you mumbled, what kind of quote was that?

Reyna's place was old, there were bugs in the walls.

Before the slumlord flipped this place, a small film crew used to shoot amateur porn, usually with actors who were desperate for money. You painted the walls purple as soon as you moved in with Reyna. The record player and the albums were yours. The rest of it belonged to Reyna. As you lugged your box in, the realization jostled you: If you vanished, your last few possessions would disappear within an hour at a garage sale. And not because they once belonged to you — if anything, the world was seeking to erase your existence at every turn. You wondered where your childhood photos went then remembered the first time you had a yearbook picture taken.

At the time, it felt like the scary scene in E.T., but it became a good thing. It put you on-record somewhere. You didn't want to blink and people were gone and it was just you in a lagging nothing. You squint. You felt like a 7-year-old all over again. A plane rumbled by overhead. The lamps felt brighter than normal. Wait for the photographer to say "Cheese" so you can smile.

When was this thing going to happen. What would it look like?

With each tiny movement, the couch made a cadaver-like, spring-loaded, sexual groan. And, alone in the room, you arrive into what had always been ahead. We call this a shift in tenses — from the past to the present. You blink, and blink, to stop your eyes as they quiver. You've made your way into a scene all right, and now the camera and the lights have chosen you. The timidity of your surroundings goes away. You taste something familiar, like tres leche or cold pizza.

The radio shift of the air as the next song starts playing.

You sink into a respiratory closeness. The snare-kick cadence of blood, heartbeat, breathing. Thump. Woosh. Hit-hit. Breathe. Thump. Woosh. Hit-hit. Breathe. Inside you, microscopic civilizations collaborate and battle, and some of them have started losing. For a moment, you feel the flush of sadness, but it evaporates, you remember the quote about your body is a cathedral or something. Brick, mortar, brick, mortar, how it came together. You realize your eyes have fallen shut and you panic them open. Too close, too enveloped. And too warm, although you feel shivering-cold at the same time.

“What the hell was in that heroin?” you bark, and laugh a baking soda laugh.

You went too far down, is all. You know what's inside you, even if you can't list each bone, organ, platelet, brain fold. Blink. Thump. Blink. Hit-hit. Breathe.

You're cozy, but there's also a nagging weight, and you're not sure if you should fight it, or if you even could. Blink. Breathe, breathe. Thump. Blink. Hit-hit, breathe, breathe, breathe. You spy on the ceiling's patterns, and an upward motion calms you. You're in a wood room in an artwork of houses, in a city on a swamp, in a state that has

a reputation for independence and grandeur, in a part of the country that stays friendly but still watchful, in a country with the fitful panic of a boxer getting his fists taped, in a hemisphere of forward revolutions, in a culture that rewards nudity, power, and a roof lined with satellites, in a world with so many lifeforms that different species rarely coincide, in a row of testicular worlds facing a similar direction, in the hunk-round blanket of nightfall and void, in a reflection of stars and the heat of their brightness, in the arrogant passage of space along time and above all that padding around it, up or around or over, maybe something that is motherlike and supine, something that shovels us out of this life and into some new carriage, a gentle flow of constellations, you're there, and sweat capers out of you, because now you are somewhere, even if it has all the outcomes you mocked, which you'd considered too simple, breathe, hit, breathe, thump-hit, and somehow all your homeless years fade, tucking you in, a swaddle of napkins, you no longer feel like a target, drifting around like some jackass, a life that you treated worse than an itchy sweater.

You traveled so many places but you never made it to Asia, with all the jungles and lions and misshapen churches, paddling along, the way they burn the dead in Bombay then drop them in water and all the people stare as the bodies gnarl into ashy chunks, how the oceans are giant bathtubs full of sharks and eels and ugly crustaceans, with giant continents of trash floating, all the minutiae we discarded, all the parcels we gave up on — distracted, Jawad, distracted by the elusiveness of Word and Spirit, the flow of endlessness passing through us, moving so fast and invisible that we never get a full look ... and you, like many people, Jawad, had just begun to assume that the abstract things were illusions. Well now you return to a memory of Mexico City, you

were 14 or 15, and you liked how the steel-and-glass buildings sat beside relics and markets. Your father pointed at a cathedral and said, “That one is sinking, they built it in the 1500s and its sinking every day, and they discovered an Aztec temple below it, like mattress, then mattress, then mattress,” which you found beautiful for some reason, no matter how basic it sounded.

So you took pictures with a disposable camera as you wondered past vagrants and smog and you plucked at bobs of poinsettia. The mistakes of your life would come later, you felt this even if it didn’t make sense, and those mistakes would amount to a story — this story, to be specific, the only proof that you existed. You believed this as cheap Toyotas rumbled past, farting out a noxious heat, a deafening roar of engines and horns, sharp in the late October heat of an Aztec metropolis. Every few feet you walked into a new smell — roasted pork, orchids, piss, the spray from a fountain, paint fumes, cigarette smoke. You coughed, then ducked out of the taffeta brightness and into shade, a forage concrete with flanking weeds pillowed into the afro of a news stand, past trees rimmed with a searching pale-green, then you turned a corner. It stopped you for a moment. You had to adjust to the sunlight but also because the street just opened into an enormous square, full of buskers and jugglers and women in colorful wedding dresses, the entire square thriving with dance and costume, so crowded that it was hard to see any one thing or person, a parade of flags and masks, trumpets and violins. Then you saw a woman in all white.

It looked like she’d wrapped her entire body with immaculate towels, then raked together a patchwork of white fabrics, strings, flowers, so bright that everything else grew dull around her, and the roaring square grew quiet. All you could hear was the

rattle of her shopping cart and its farm of white stones and mirrors and plates and feathers and Styrofoam. Much of it was garbage, fragments from a broken chair, shreds of blank paper, but, when you saw all of it together, it became sacrosanct and chilling, so hypnotic that you found yourself walking toward the woman. You thumbed the pinwheel of your disposable camera and aimed it at her, all you could see were her eyes, which, on seeing the camera, darted. All her layers tensed up as she raised with toes like some off-brand levitation. Then she turned around. You watched her leave, blink, blink, breathe. When you came back to your senses, you looked around and realized you had walked into the middle of the parade, it snaked all around you.

And you swore in that moment that you would be a wonderful thing when you got older, that the people you met would see that weird flash in your eyes, and even as you changed, as the peroxide grey darkened into black, which spread a little more each birthday, you could return to the fury of that moment, breathe, palsies of foam, breathe, and you smile a tired smile as you remember.

You fell in love with being an outsider, Jawad, and I would not have done that. The last time I saw you, you were distracted as usual, amused by the entanglements of getting older but going nowhere. The poxed shelter of a vagrant, a trickster, but you know what, Jawad, you can have this sugar skull, it's got your name right there at the base. Hump. Hp. Breath. The last time I gave you a calavera like this one, you dropped it in the toilet. The sugar fell apart in lumps. All the bright colors bled out. I got you this sugar skull, Jawad. It's here on this paper, which I keep on the mantle next to my records. Covered in dust, and the ink has faded.

At night it glows a little.

Sometimes I listen to pretty music, Jawad, when the skull glows a little at night. Now you're a sugar skull or a yearbook picture or garage sale or a lady in all white who might not exist. After all, you were quite the liar, Jawad. But I got you this sugar skull. It's got this inscription. Can you make out the words? Are they generous enough? Can you see the trail of disasters you left behind? Your sugar skull looks so smug in its sombrero, with its rounded jaws and varicolored teeth. The eyes are gone and it's just sugar-bone and socket.

Occasionally, once every month or so, the silhouette of who you were flashes past me. It feels like an obligation. I can't say that I saw you as a brother, or that, in the end, I even cared where you'd gone. You prick. But I will say, Jawad, I keep feeling a backdraft. The sedations of God. A hum that I ignored at first, for the first few days, until I sat down and began typing. I almost hold it against you, that I sat down and wrote about you. But it makes sense to me now — well, as much as any author's own story can make sense to themselves. Stories are funny like that. And yours was the funniest and saddest of all. It's not for me to say whether or not you mattered in life. Only that you pay attention at this moment. Can you make out the words? They're the darker parts that freckle the pure white stage of paper or screen or whatever you're seeing.