

The Dog

JOSEPH
O'NEILL

(a novel)



ALSO BY JOSEPH O'NEILL

FICTION

Netherland
The Breezes
This Is the Life

NONFICTION

Blood-Dark Track: A Family History



THE DOG

Joseph O'Neill



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Here's the smell of the blood still: all the
perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little
hand.

—Shakespeare, *Macbeth*

I feel as a chessman must feel when the
opponent says of it: That piece cannot be
moved.

—Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*

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Acknowledgments

A Note About the Author

PERHAPS BECAUSE OF MY GROWING SENSE of the inefficiency of life lived on land and in air, of my growing sense that the accumulation of experience amounts, when all is said and done and pondered, simply to extra weight, so that one ends up dragging oneself around as if imprisoned in one of those Winnie the Pooh suits of explorers of the deep, I took up diving. As might be expected, this decision initially aggravated the problem of inefficiency. There was the bungling associated with a new endeavor, and there was the exhaustion brought on by over-watching the films of Jacques Cousteau. And yet, once I'd completed advanced scuba training and a Fish Identification Course and I began to dive properly and in fact at every opportunity, I learned that the undersea world may be nearly a pure substitute for the world from which one enters it. I cannot help pointing out that this substitution has the effect of limiting what might be termed the biographical import of life—the momentousness to which one's every drawing of breath seems damned. To be, almost without metaphor, a fish in water: what liberation.

I loved to dive at Musandam. Without fail my buddy was Ollie Christakos, who is from Cootamundra, Australia. One morning, out by one of the islands, we followed a wall at a depth of forty feet. At the tip of the island were strong currents, and once we had passed through these I looked up and saw an immense moth, it seemed for a moment, hurrying through the open water above. It was a remarkable thing, and I turned to alert Ollie. He was preoccupied. He was pointing beneath us, farther down the wall, into green and purple abyssal water. I looked: there was nothing there. With very uncharacteristic agitation, Ollie kept pointing, and again I looked and saw nothing. On the speedboat, I told him about the eagle ray. He stated that he'd spotted something a lot better than an eagle ray and that very frankly he was a little bit disappointed I wasn't able to verify it. Ollie said, "I saw the Man from Atlantis."

This was how I first heard of Ted Wilson—as the Man from Atlantis. The nickname derived from the seventies TV drama of that name. It starred Patrick Duffy as the lone survivor from a ruined underwater civilization, who becomes involved in various adventures in which he puts to good use his inordinate aquatic powers. From my childhood I retained only the memory of *Man from Atlantis*: its amphibious hero propelled himself through the liquid element not with his arms, which remained at his sides, but by a forceful undulation of his trunk and legs. It was not suggested by anybody that Wilson was a superman. But it was said that Wilson spent more time below the surface of water than above, that he always went out alone, and that his preference was for dives, including night-time dives, way too risky for a solo diver. It was said that he wore a wet suit the coloring of which—olive green with faint swirls of pale green, dark green, and yellow—made him all but invisible in and around the reefs, where, of course, hide-and-seek is the mortal way of things. Among the more fanatic local divers an underwater sighting of Wilson was grounds for sending an e-mail to interested parties setting out all relevant details of the event, and some jester briefly put up a webpage with a chart on which corroborated sightings would be represented by a grinning emoticon and uncorroborated ones by an emoticon with an iffy expression. Whatever. People will do anything to keep busy. Who knows if the chart, which in my opinion constituted a hounding, had any factual basis: it is perhaps needless to bring up that the Man from Atlantis and his

motives gave rise to a lot of speculation and mere opinion, and that accordingly it is difficult especially in light of the other things that were said about him, to be confident about the actual rather than the fabulous extent of Wilson's undersea life; but there seems no question he spent unusual amounts of time underwater.

I must be careful, here, to separate myself distinctly from the milling of this man, Wilson, by rumor. It's one thing to offer intrusive conjecture about a person's recreational activities; another thing to place a person into a machine for grinding by crushing. This happened to Ted Wilson. He was discussed into dust. That's Dubai, I suppose—a country of buzz. Maybe the secrecy of the Ruler precludes any other state of affairs, and maybe not. There is no question that spreading everywhere in the emirate are opacities that, since we are on the subject, call to my mind submarine depths. And so the place makes gossips of us whether we like it or not, and makes us susceptible to gullibility and false shrewdness. I'm not sure there is a good way to counteract this; it may even be that there arrives a moment when the veteran of the never-ending struggle for solid facts perversely becomes greener than ever. Not long ago, I heard a story about a Tasmanian tiger for sale in Satwa and half-believed it.

Ted Wilson, it turned out, had an apartment in The Situation—the apartment building where I live. His place was on the twentieth floor, two above mine. Our interaction consisted of hellos in the elevator. Then, plunging or rising, we would study the Egyptian hieroglyphs inscribed on the stainless steel sides of the car. These encounters reduced almost to nothing my curiosity about him. Wilson was a man in his forties of average height and weight, with a mostly bald head. He had the kind of face that seems to me purely Anglo-Saxon, that is drained of all color and features, and perhaps in reaction to this drainage he was, as I noticed, a man who fiddled at growing gray-blond goatees, beards, mustaches, sideburns. There was no sign of gills or webbed fingers.

The striking thing about him was his American accent. Few Americans move here, the usual explanation being that we must pay federal taxes on worldwide income and will benefit relatively little from the fiscal advantages the United Arab Emirates offers its denizens. The theory is, I think, only partly right. A further fraction of the answer must be that the typical American candidate for expatriation to the Gulf, who might without disparagement be described as the mediocre office worker, has little instinct for emigration. To put it another way, a person usually needs a special incentive to be here—or, perhaps more accurately, not to be elsewhere—and surely this is all the more true for the American who, rather than trying his luck in California or Texas or New York, chooses to come to this strange desert metropolis. Either way, fortune will play its expected role. I suppose I say all this from experience.

In early 2007, in a New York City cloakroom, I ran into a college friend, Edmond Batros. I hadn't thought about Eddie in years, and of course it was difficult to equate without shock this thirty-seven-year-old with his counterpart in memory. Whereas in college he'd been a chubby Lebanese kid who seemed dumbstruck by a pint of beer and whom everyone felt a little sorry for, grown-up Eddie gave every sign—pink shirt unbuttoned to the breastbone, suntan, glimmering female companion, twenty-buck tip to the coat-check girl—of being a brazenly contented man of the world. If he hadn't approached me and identified himself, I wouldn't have known him. We hugged, and there was a to-do about the wonderful improbability of it all. Eddie was only briefly in town and we agreed to meet the next day for

dinner at Asia de Cuba. It was there, by the supposedly holographic waterfall, that we reminisced about the year we lived in a Dublin house occupied by college students who had in common only that we were not Irish: aside from me and Eddie, there was a Belgian and an Englishman and a Greek. Eddie and I were not by any stretch great pals but we had as an adventitious link the French language: I spoke it because of my francophone Swiss mother and Eddie because he'd grown up in that multilingual Lebanese way, speaking fluent if slightly alien versions of French, English, and Arabic. In Ireland we'd mutter asides to each other in French and feel that this betokened something important. I had no idea his family was worth hundreds of millions of dollars.

Now he ordered one drink after another. Like a couple of old actuaries, we could not avoid surveying the various outcomes that long-lost friends or near-friends had met with. Eddie, with his Facebook account, was much more up to speed than I. From him I learned that our poor soul had had two autistic children, and that another had intentionally fallen into traffic from an overpass near Dublin airport. As he talked, I was confronted with a strangely painful idiosyncratic memory—how, during the rugby season, a vast, chaotic crowd periodically filled the street on which our house was situated and, seemingly by a miracle of arithmetic, went without residue into the stadium at the top of the road, a fateful mass subtraction that would make me think, with my youngster's lavish melancholy, of our species' brave collective merriness in the face of death. Out of the stadium came from time to time the famous Irish refrain

Alive, alive-o

Alive, alive-o.

Obviously, I did not share this flashback with Eddie.

He removed a pair of sunglasses from his breast pocket and very ceremoniously put them on.

"You've got to be kidding me," I said. The young Eddie had ridiculously worn these very shades at all times, even indoors. He was one of those guys for whom *Top Gun* was a bible movie.

Eddie said, "Oh yes, I'm still rocking the Aviators." He said, "Remember that standoff with the statistics professor?"

I remembered. This man had forbidden Eddie from wearing shades to his lectures. The interdiction had crushed Eddie. His shades were fitted with lenses for his myopia; having to wear regular spectacles would have destroyed him. I advised him, "He can fuck himself. You do your thing. It's a free world."

"He's a total bastard. He'll throw me out of the class."

I said, "Let him! You want to wear shades, wear shades. What's he saying—he gets to decide what you wear? Eddie, sometimes you've got to draw a line in the sand."

Line in the sand? What was I talking about? What did I know about lines in the sand?

Young Eddie declared, "*Je vous ai compris!*" He persisted in wearing his sunglasses. The lecturer did nothing about it.

"That was a real lesson," Eddie told me at Asia de Cuba. "Fight them on the beaches. Fight them on the landing grounds." Removing the Ray-Bans—he preserved them as a talisman

now, and had a collection of hundreds of tinted bifocals for day-to-day use; on his travels he personally hand-carried his shades in a customized photographer's briefcase—Eddie told me that he'd taken over from his father the running of various Batros enterprises. In return I told him a little about my own situation. Either I was more revealing than I'd thought or Eddie Batros was now something of a psychologist, because soon afterward he wrote to me with a job offer. He stated that he'd wanted for some time to appoint a Batros family trustee ("to keep an eye on our holdings, trusts, investment portfolios, etc.") but had not found a qualified person who both was ready to move to Dubai (where the Batros Group and indeed some Batros family members were nominally headquartered) and enjoyed, as such a person by definition had to, the family's "limitless trust." "Hoping against hope," as he put it, he wondered if I might be open to considering the position. His e-mail asserted,

I know of no more honest man than you.

There was no reasonable basis for this statement, but I was moved by it—for a moment I wept a little, in fact. I wrote back expressing my interest. Eddie answered,

OK. You will have to meet Sandro then decide. He will get in touch with you soon.

Sandro was the older of the two Batros brothers. I'd never met him.

Right away I came up with a plan. The plan was to fly New York-[Dubai]. This is to say, I had no interest in Dubai qua Dubai. My interest was in getting out of New York. If Eddie's job had been in Djibouti, the plan would have been to fly New York-[Djibouti].

OF COURSE DJIBOUTI POPS into my head for a reason. The French Foreign Legion has long maintained a presence there, and among the earliest and most reprehensibly innocent manifestations of my wish to flee New York was a fascination with the *Légion étrangère*. These men without a past! They suddenly struck me as marvelous, these white-kepi-wearing internationals whose predecessors fought famously, as my online searches revealed, at Magenta and at Puebla and at Dien Bien Phu, at Kolwezi and Bir Hakeim, at Aisne and Narvik and Fort Bamboo. *Vous, légionnaires, vous êtes soldats pour mourir, et je vous envoie où l'on meurt*. Unless the Wikipedia page misled, such were the exhortations that might drive into battle a fellow originating from any corner of the world yet beholden not at all to the compulsory systems of obligation of his native land. On the contrary, the legionnaire was bound only by the sincere comradeship into which he had voluntarily and humbly entered, a brotherly commitment captured with moving straightforwardness by his Code of Honor. I wanted to jump on a plane to Paris and sign up.

Though laughter would seem called for, I look back with astonishment and concern at the would-be soldier. How could this man, who had committed no crime and was guilty, to the best of my knowledge and belief, of not much more than the hurtfulness built into a human life—how could he find himself drawn to this absurd association of desperadoes and runaways? I remember how I yearned for a remote solitary fate causing shame and inconvenience to no one, for a life neither in the right nor in the wrong. Then along came

Eddie Batros.

As the weeks passed and I heard nothing more from either Eddie or his brother and dai fought off the impulse to text Eddie for an update, it seemed that every five minutes brought mention of my new destination—Dubai. “God, I could be in my swimming pool in Dubai b now,” groaned an English flight attendant during a runway holdup. The Albanian manager o my local hardware store said to somebody, “They got a hotel at the bottom of the sea. The got millionaires, billionaires. Beckham lives there, Brad Pitt lives there, every day you g Lamborghinis crashing into other Lamborghinis, every day you got sunshine, the gas basically free, they got no taxes, it’s heaven on earth.” Dubai was suddenly everywhere, eve in the office. A team from Capital Markets went over there for a two-day consultation th dragged on for ten days, and the whole thing turned into such a billing blowout that Kare from Administration was forced to look into it. The traveling partners, Dzeko an Olsenburger, reported that the quantum of fees and disbursements had to be seen in th relevant factual matrix, namely that the client had put up the team in a seven-star hotel t two-thousand-USD-a-night duplex suites offering a twelve-pillow pillow menu, a forty-two inch plasma television set in a massive gold leaf frame, a rain room, a butler service, an Hermès shower gel and shampoo and unguents. Also significant, for the purpose o establishing an appropriate billing benchmark, was the client’s frankly carefree concierging o the hotel’s Rolls-Royce chauffeur service and its further concierging, on more than on occasion, of the hotel helicopter service. Moreover, excessive billing reasonableness by th firm might be perceived as verging on underbilling, a practice evidently inconsistent, in th eyes of this client, with a law firm of world-class standing. Afterward, getting hammered ov cocktails, Dzeko more informally stated that these oil Arabs—he didn’t want to generaliz there were other kinds of Arabs of course—these particular oil Arabs either had n understanding of how money worked, no idea about profit or value, or else knew all about but just didn’t give a shit and took a sick fucking pleasure in seeing these Westerners runni around like pigs, snorting up cash on their hands and knees.

Dzeko was what we called a shovelhead, the kind of lawyer whose enormous industriousness is on the same intellectual plane as a ditchdigger’s, so it was surprising t hear him come out with these speculations. But Dubai had called forth his inner theorist. Suc was the provocative power of the brand, which was never more powerful, of course, than 2007. In the middle of one of those agitated and sometimes frightening bouts of Googlin with which, in those days, I would pass away my evenings, I finally entered “dubai” in th search box rather than, say, “fertility + aging” or “psychopathy” or “narcissism” or “huge breasts” or “tread + softly + dreams.”

I couldn’t believe my eyes, in part because I was not actually meant to believe my eyes o was meant to believe them in a special way, because many of the image results were n photographs of real Dubai but, rather, of renderings of a Dubai that was under constructio or as yet conceptual. In any case I was left with the impression of a fantastic actual and/o soon-to-be city, an abracadrapolis in which buildings flopped against each other an skyscrapers looked wobbly or were rumped or might be twice as tall and slender as th Empire State Building, a city whose coastline featured bizarre man-made peninsulas as well a those already-famous artificial islets known as The World, so named because they we grouped to suggest, to a bird’s eye, a physical map of the world; a city where huge stilts ro

out of the earth and disappeared like Jack's beanstalk, three hundred meters up, into synthetic cloud. Apparently the cloud contained, or would in due course contain, a platform with a park and other amenities.

The marketing strategists obviously were counting on me, the electronic traveler, to spread the word—Dubai! But if it's possible to have a proper-noun antonym of Marco Polo, my name would be that antonym. To me, this wonderland was the same as any other human place: boiled down to a bunch of rooms. I had a theory or two about rooms. They were still fresh in my mind, those evenings when Jenn would pace in circles in our Gramercy Park one-bedroom in order to dramatize the one-bedroom's long-term impracticality and reinforce the analysis she was offering, namely that all would be well if she and I, first, mentally let go of our apartment, the historic and rent-stabilized location of our love; second, acknowledge that it made sense to buy a place that would more readily accommodate the kid or kids who, in contradiction to her earlier feelings on the matter, Jenn now definitely felt ready to try to have; and accordingly, third, that all would be well as soon as we got ourselves a place with *more rooms*. I must have said little. I certainly failed to mention the following insight: if you cannot identify a single room in the world entry into which will make you joyful—if you cannot point to a particular actual or imagined room, among the billions of rooms in the world, and state truthfully, Inside *that* room I will find joy—well, then you have found a useful measure of where you stand in the matter of joy. And in the matter of rooms, too.

One way to sum up the stupidity of this phase of my life, a phase I'm afraid is ongoing, would be to call it the phase of insights.

During my first internet encounter with Dubai I had a vision (a thing of a split second) of myself, somehow disembodied, hurrying from tall building to tall building and from floor to floor and from room to room, endlessly making haste through one space after another and never finding good cause to stay or even pause. I associated this ghostly hurrier with one of those computer worms, created by the Israeli and/or American security agencies, whose function is to pass without trace from one computer to another, searching and searching until it finds what it seeks—whereupon it does damage. As a corrective to this unpleasant notion, perhaps, I developed an intensely enjoyable daydream of marooning myself on one of the outer islands of The World, say a fragment of "Scandinavia" or "Greenland," and living in a no-frills if comfortable almost-carbon-neutral cabin, alone except perhaps for a pet dog (one of those breeds that specialize in running into and out of water), a palm tree or two, and the odd visiting bird. I went through a period of islomania the symptoms of which included discovering the word "islomania," Googling "bee + loud + glade" and "islands + stream + Bee + Gees," and going to sleep every night listening to "La Isla Bonita."

Eventually I caved—I called Eddie for an update.

He told me everything was still on track but that the time line was kind of wavy on account mainly of Sandro's scheduling issues but that bottom line everything was A-OK. "Listen, I'm so sorry about this, I feel terrible, I'm going to take care of this right away, it's total bullshit." He apologized at such length, incriminated himself so excessively, that I began to feel a puzzled guilt. Had I missed something? Had Eddie done something wrong? He had not; and, knowing Eddie as I now do, I can see this was probably a tactical mea culpa and he was just handling me the way one handles any problem. I'm not suggesting Eddie has a low nature; I just think he's not above preferring business objectives to personal ones. (F

subsequently admitted this to me, indeed insisted on it. He said (on the phone), “There’s something we need to be clear on. I’m not going to nickel-and-dime you. You’re going to get a sweet deal. Draft your own contract; do your worst. But you sign that dotted line, you’re playing with the big boys. Same thing between me and my brother and my father: no favors. No mulligans. No quarter asked or given.” Eddie laughed a little, and I laughed a little, too, in part at the thought of my grown-up old friend raising the Jolly Roger of business. “Got it,” he said. “Absolutely.”)

“No worries,” I said to him. “These things always take time.” I was being sincere. I didn’t hold the delay against Eddie. He wasn’t to know that the passage of time was unusually painful for me, that my circumstances at work were unbearable now that Jenn and I had separated and had to spend our days dodging each other at the office and being downright tortured by the other’s nearness.

(From what I gathered, in addition to the core pain of the ending of our partnership, Jenn was suffering horribly from “humiliation” that was never keener than when she was at work surrounded by the co-workers in whose eyes she felt herself unbearably lowered. I began to investigate this important question of humiliation, which I didn’t fully understand (even though I, too, found it almost intolerable to show my face at the office and there be subjected, as I detected or imagined, to unsympathetic evaluation by certain parties). It seemed to me that there had to be, in this day and age, a substantiated, widely accepted understanding of such an ancient mental state. I took it upon myself to visit websites dedicated to modern psychological advances and to drop in on discussion sites where, with an efficacy previously unavailable in the history of human endeavor, one might receive the benefit of the wisdom, experience, and learning of a self-created global network of a community of those most personally and ideally interested in humiliation, and in this way stand on the shoulders of a giant and, it followed, enjoy an unprecedented panorama of the subject. I cannot say that it turned out as I’d hoped. It would have been hard to uncover a more vicious and inflammatory collection of opiners and inveighers than this group of communitarians, who, perhaps distorted by a bitter private familiarity with humiliation and/or by the barbarism in their natures, applied themselves to the verbal burning down of every attempt at reasoning and constructiveness. Frankly, it was grotesque and frightening to behold. Apparently the torch of knowledge, conserved through the ages by monks and scholars and brought to brilliance by the noblest spirits of modernity, now was in the hands of an irresistible horde of arsonists.)

In late March, I received a call from a woman speaking on behalf of Sandro Batros. She wanted to postpone the get-together until the morrow, Sunday.

“How do you mean, ‘the get-together’?” I said.

“I’m transferring you now,” she said.

I heard Sandro say how much he was looking forward to at last meeting his little brother’s friend. He said, “Listen, just a heads-up, I’m fat. Fat as in really big. Maybe Eddie told you. I just wanted to let you know. No surprises. Cards on the table.”

Next thing, the assistant was telling me the appointment had been rescheduled to 10:00 a.m. at Sandro’s suite at Claridge’s hotel.

I said, “Claridge’s in London?” I heard no reply. I said, “I’m in New York. I’m in the U.S.A.”

“OK,” she said after a long pause, very absorbed by something.

I hung up, caught a plane to London, and took a taxi from Heathrow to Mayfair. I cannot extinguish from memory the terrifying racing red numbers of the meter. At 9:07 a.m., arrived at Claridge's. I recall clearly that the taxi came to halt behind a Bentley. I presented myself at the Claridge's front desk at 9:08. The receptionist told me that Mr. Batros had checked out. She pointed back at the entrance. There he goes, she said, and we watched the hotel Bentley pull away.

Sandro's assistant didn't return my calls. Neither did Eddie.

My return flight was not till the evening. What to do? It was a miserable, rainy day, and walk was out of the question. Moreover this was London, a city I've never taken to, maybe because to visit the place even for a short time is to be turned upside down like a piggy bank and shaken until one is emptied of one's last little coin. I got the Tube back to Heathrow.

Looking up from my newspaper in the departure lounge, I saw two French-speaking little girls sneaking around histrionically as they tried to attach a paper fish to their father's jacket. The mother was in on the prank and the father was, too, although he was pretending not to notice. Something old-fashioned about the scene made me check the date on my newspaper. It was April 1, 2007.

So long as I have adequate legroom, I like flying long haul. The trip back to New York was spent contentedly enough: watching Bourne movies, which for some reason I never tire of; drinking little bottles of red wine from Argentina; and mentally composing a series of phantasmal e-mails to Eddie Batros. Successively deploying modes of outrage, good humor, coldness, ruefulness, and businesslike brevity, I let him know again and again about the London debacle and its inevitable consequence, namely, that I was withdrawing myself from consideration for the Dubai opening.

MORE THAN EVER, I am in the habit of formulating e-mails that have no counterpart in face. For example, currently I am ideating (among others) the following:

Eddie—I think we should have a talk about Alain. I completely understand that the boy needs help, but quite frankly I cannot be his babysitter. Could you please inform Sandro that he will have to make a different arrangement?

And:

Sandro—Please confirm that, contrary to what I'm told by Gustav in Geneva, I am authorized to pay MM. Trigueros and Salzer-Levi for their work on the Divonne apartment. Mme. Spindler, the cleaner, is also indisputably owed money. Or is it our position that they are bound by contractual obligations and we are not?

And:

Sandro—You cannot involve me in your yachting arrangements so long as you require me knowingly to make false representations to the crew. This is professionally and personally intolerable. Now I am instructed (so I understand) to inform Silvio that mooring costs at Bodrum are his responsibility, when such is not, has never been, nor could ever be, the case. My response to you therefore is: (1) I will not say anything of the kind to Silvio; (2) this is the last straw; and (3) the first sentence hereof is repeated.

And:

Sandro—In answer to this morning's directive ("Make it happen"), I can only repeat that it is currently impossible to purchase Maltese citizenship for your cousins. Maltese law does not yet permit it, and I do not control the Parliament of Malta. I am ruled by the facts of the world.

The reason I don't physically send, or even type, these e-mails is that it would be pointless. The Batros brothers are not to be influenced, never mind corrected. Even if they were, it would not be by e-mail and, even if by e-mail, then not by me. When I first took this job, I often write them tactfully making points A and B or floating X or running Y up the flagpole, or, finally, forcefully advising Z, and the consequence in all cases was nil. It's unsettling to be in a position where the performance of actions ceases to have the effect of making one an actor. This is a problem for all of us working on planet Batrosia, as we term it, and I'm sure I'm not the only Batrosian who, in reaction, composes phantom communiqués.

Arguably it is a little mad to covertly inhabit a bodiless universe of candor and receptivity. But surely real lunacy would be to pitch selfhood's tent in the world of exteriors. Let me turn the proposition around: only a lunatic would fail to distinguish between himself and his representative self. This banal distinction may be most obvious in the workplace, where, invariably one must avail oneself of an even-tempered, abnormally industrious dummy stand-in who, precisely because it is a dummy, makes life easier for all the others, who are themselves present, which is to say, represented, by dummies of their own. A strange feature of the whole Jenn thing was that when the news of our breakup got out—i.e., when Jenn got out her version of her news; I kept my facts to myself—some people at the office, and I don't think this is paranoia, emerged from their dummy entities. I'd be walking down a corridor with my basically upbeat office persona when it would become clear, from the hostile look I'd get from a passing colleague, that the normal dummy-to-dummy footing had been replaced by an unfriendly person-to-person relation—or woman-to-man, as I reluctantly came to believe. I had been educated to accept the factual, moral, and legal invalidity of pretty much every constructed gender differentiation—and yet there existed, I think I discovered, a secret feminine jurisdiction authorizing the condemnation of men in respect of wrongs only men could commit! More than once my arrival in a room was followed by the sudden scattering of women and the stifling of their laughter, and wherever I went, it seemed to me, I was given no time to understand, from significant silences and mocking gestures of friendliness, that I'd been seen through—seen through all the way into my odious male nucleus. This subtle invasion of my being was my punishment. Meanwhile the men stayed in their shells—in hiding, was my impression. Though one time, in the restroom, there was a fellow who wordlessly slapped me on the back with a certain amount of sympathy.

It was ironic, this eerie coming-to-life of my colleagues, because Jenn and I had been undone by the reverse development: at some point our bona fide human interaction had been thoroughly replaced by a course of dealing involving only our body doubles. The figure that gripped me, when I began to think about what was happening to us, was that we had been transformed into zombies controlled, it could only be, by evolution's sorcery. Which is to say the question of children having been (so we thought) answered—we couldn't reproduce without complicated medical intervention and so decided not to—our being together became

a matter of outwardness, so that whether we dined wittily with friends or, in bed, felt for the other's body, we might as well have been jerking lifelessly down Broadway, flesh drooping from our faces, triggering panic; and by the time we, or rather Jenn, changed her/our mind about the baby, it was too late. In this sense, it came as a relief when it came to pass, late in the fall of 2006, that Jenn took sole possession of the rent-stabilized Gramercy one-bedroom and, after a brief crisis of relocation, I moved into a luxury rental with a view of Lincoln Tunnel traffic. This move, which involved some extraordinarily painful and exhausting and unbelievable scenes, at least brought what might be called spatial realism to our situation.

It was to this apartment of reality that I returned from the trip made in vain to London. I concluded that the most powerful statement I could make to the brothers Batros was to make no statement. Certainly it would have been self-contradictory to say to them that I had nothing more to say to them. Moreover, I was under no obligation of communication and indeed had just been so fucked over by them that it was hard to see what proper basis there might be for future communication on any subject. The salient point: I had no option but to put an end to my Dubai scheming—a suppression that cannot have been without side effects. It was around this time that, every evening after work, I tried to run from my building lobby to my luxury rental on the eighteenth floor. My intention must have been to become fitter, feel more competent, clear my mind, etc.

I used the emergency stairway. To begin with, I could only run up to the third floor and would in effect creep up the rest of the way. Though I improved quickly, the going was always very hard after ten floors or so, and in order to push myself, I suppose, I fell into the habit of imagining that I was a firefighter and that a fire raged on the eighteenth floor and two young sisters were trapped up there in the smoke and the flames. The problem with this motivational fantasy was that it placed excessive demands on my real-world athletic capacities, so that by the time I finally reached my luxury rental I'd be in a state of very real distress because I was too late to save the two little girls, images of whose futile struggle for survival would pass through my mind in horrible flashes as I made my desperate, sweating ascent. A shower and a Bud Light would just about wash away this upset, but I doubt it was coincidence that during this period I found myself brooding on the story of the Subway Samaritan—the New York construction worker who had, back in January, jumped in the path of an oncoming subway train to rescue a man who, in the course of a seizure, had fallen onto the tracks. Specifically, the Subway Samaritan had pushed the Fallen Traveler into the trench between the tracks and lain on top of him while the screeching train passed overhead.

I deeply envied this man, though not on account of the money and benefits in kind that immediately rained down on him. (The Subway Samaritan, who had acted for the benefit of a stranger, himself became the beneficiary of the largesse and assistance of parties personally unknown to him, including Donald Trump (ten thousand USD check); Chrysler (gift of a Jeep Patriot); the Gap (five thousand USD gift card); Playboy Enterprises, Inc. (free lifetime subscription to *Playboy* magazine (the Samaritan had worn a beanie with a Playboy Bunny logo during the rescue)); the New York Film Academy (five thousand USD in acting scholarships for the Samaritan's six- and eight-year-old daughters (the Fallen Traveler was a student at the Film Academy)); the Walt Disney World Resort (all-expenses-paid family trip to Disney World, plus Mickey Mouse ears for the girls, plus tickets to *The Lion King*); the New Jersey Nets (free season ticket); Beyoncé (complimentary backstage passes and tickets to

Beyoncé concert); Jason Kidd (signed Jason Kidd shirt); Progressive (gratis two years of Progressive auto insurance); and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (one-year supply of MetroCards).) Nor was it the case that I envied the Samaritan his sudden celebrity and public glory: he could keep his Bronze Medallion from the city of New York and his appearances on *Letterman* and *Ellen*, and he was certainly welcome to his guest appearance at the State of the Union Address of George W. Bush, at which, bearing the title “the Hero of Harlem” (like Lenny Skutnik, “the Hero of the Potomac,” before him), he was the object of congressional and presidential admiration and congratulation. No, my envy belonged to a less material though maybe no less indefensible plane: I coveted the Samaritan’s newly earned and surely undisputed privilege to walk into a room—an everyday room containing everyday persons—and be there received as your presumably decent human being presumably doing a pretty decent job of doing his best to do the right thing in what is, however you look at it, a difficult world.

But no—that privilege was disputed! It came to my notice that *even the Subway Samaritan* could not escape criticism from the online community, some members of which apparently didn’t “buy” the whole “story,” and suspected something “fishy” was going on, and noted that at the time of the incident this man was escorting his daughters to “their” (i.e., their mother’s) (i.e., not the Samaritan’s) home; had inexplicably and recklessly preferred the interests of a “total” stranger to those of his daughters; and (reading between the lines of even respectable threads) was a lowly African-American man and thus *prima facie* a parental failure and a person of hidden or soon-to-be-revealed criminality. I remember one electronic bystander invoking what he called the Stalin principle. That is, he rhetorically asked if Stalin would be a good guy just because he’d once helped a little old lady to cross a road. More clever than the small-minded chorus, and more menacing to one’s simple admiration of and gratitude for a brave and worthy deed, were those who questioned the whole “heroism industry,” who suggested that this kind of uncalled-for and disproportionately self-sacrificial intervention was ethically invalid because it could hardly be said that good people habitually did or should do likewise, and that moreover it was stupid retroactively to treat as virtuous an obviously reckless act that could very easily have had the consequence of depriving two children of their father. Another commenter even proposed that there was no point in looking for moral lessons in the behavior of some unthinking instinctual (black) man whose actions, in their randomness and spontaneity and irrationality, were essentially akin to the motiveless pushing of persons onto the tracks that also occurred in the New York subway.

I was like, Who died and made these people pope?

One day, I ran the stairs in the morning. This was how I discovered that I wasn’t the only runner in my building. There was another, named Don Sanchez. He was a physically and psychologically well-organized-, everything-in-order-, sanely-wry-professional-looking guy who wore sweat-wicking Under Armour shirts made from recycled plastic bottles. He had moved into our building not out of any fondness for his particular luxury rental but because, as he explained to me one day, he loved the high-quality run offered by the brand-new stairway, which had great handrails, bright yellow-edged steps, and good lighting. Don told me, laughing, that he could no longer imagine living a life that did not include “vertical athletics.” He had run the Empire State Building and dreamed of running Taipei 101 and the Swissôtel The Stamford in Singapore. He ran with musical ladybugs in his ears. He was mu

faster and stronger than I, and quickly and easily made it to the top, twenty-sixth, floor. The little girls in my blazing luxury rental would always be saved if it were Don Sanchez coming to their rescue. I quit running in the evenings and instead woke at dawn to run with Don, falling quickly behind as he skipped up two steps at a time, I was able to trot steadily onward in the knowledge that all would end well for the endangered children. So reassuring was Don that I invited him down to my place for a drink. That was not a success. I had very few lamps in my luxury rental and only a few items of furniture, and what with the long shadows and the darkness it was as if I had contrived to place us in one of those grim, I want to say Swedish, movies my poor parents often co-watched, duplicating in the arrangement of the respective chairs the arrangement of silence, gloom, and human separateness offered by the television. I confided various things to Don. He, in turn, disclosed that every year or three he'd come across a staircase that would really grab him and, other things being equal, he'd relocate to the building in question in order to run in it. He shared his physiological theories. He imparted his views on the different demands made by perpendicular and horizontal mobility, writing down for my benefit some relevant mathematical calculations. After a couple of somehow frightening evenings over the course of which each of us was, there can be little doubt, impressed more and more powerfully by the mental illness of the other, we restricted our friendship to the stairs.

By a meaningless accident, my current abode is also on the eighteenth floor, but of course it would be unheard of and frowned on and simply impermissible to race up and down the stairway at The Situation. The last thing The Situation needs is middle-aged guys running around and sweating hard in public and grunting and looking weird and signaling their pain and undermining our Ethos and putting under even more stress our already very stressed price-per-square-foot value.

THERE ARE PLENTY OF high-rises here in the Marina district, but for valuation purposes the owners of apartments at The Situation—the Uncompromising Few, as TheSituation.com names us—need be concerned with only two comparators: The Aspiration, inhabited by the Dreamers of New Dreams, and The Statement, home of the Pioneers of Luxury™. We are all each other's Joneses. Because by design we exclusively occupy Privilege Bay—an elite cove or inlet of the planet's largest man-made lagoon—and, more important, because all three residential propositions have agreed on an Excellence Ethos (the tenets of which are published on our respective websites), our troika competes internally for the favor of an ultra-discerning micro-market of property investors—those who wish to reach The Far Side of the Aspiration, in the terminology of TheAspiration.com. In principle, we three residential propositions proceed consultatively. In practice, it is like the three-way shoot-out in *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, and each will do whatever it takes to gain an advantage for itself and each reacts like lightning to the slightest move made by another. When the cardio machines in the gym at The Aspiration were upgraded, those in The Situation and The Statement were at once replaced or renewed; same story when The Situation unilaterally began to offer complimentary sparkling water to visitors waiting in the lobby, and when The Statement without warning piped therapeutic aromas into its reception area. There is increasingly good if unexpected evidence that our rivalry has in effect been collaborative,

that it has functioned as a joining of forces against the great, strange waves that have attacked the Dubai property market. True, we have taken a massive hit, or haircut; but we float on. In our respective determination to not be outdone by the other two, we have almost accidentally on purpose, cooperatively kept high our standards and morale and built up the frail composite brand conjured and encapsulated by the collective name we have given ourselves: the Privileged Three. I think of this brand as our little lifeboat. I think also of the bittersweet song I learned as a child from my mother:

Il était un petit navire

Qui n'avait ja-ja-jamais navigué.

That is, it may be that the same-boat strategy is no longer a good one. Soon, it may be every man for himself and dog-eat-dog and the horror of the *Medusa*.

Why? Because something weird is happening in the last vacant lot on Privilege Bay. This is the lot formerly dedicated to the Astrominium, which was destined to be the world's tallest residential building (at just over half a kilometer) and offer the Ultimate Height of Luxury to the Ultimate Demographic. Those of us who acquired apartments in the Privileged Three did so on the footing (reflected in the purchase price) that we would in due course live next door to the Astrominium and that our residential propositions would draw value and kudos and identity from our huge neighbor even as they kowtowed to it.

Then—the *crise financière*. Soon after, the Astrominium site gave us the spectacle of the world's largest man-made hole in the ground, its colossal dimensions made vivid by the abandoned orange digger at the bottom of the chasm. I spent many hours looking at the digger from my apartment window, my mind turning always to the idea of a lost lobster. A few months ago, the digger disappeared; and a very peculiar thing occurred. If I happen to look out my window—if “window” is the best noun for the immense glass wall that comprises the exterior perimeter of my apartment—I can see a new concrete platform on the sand, and on the platform there has risen a small concrete structure, about the size of a cottage, consisting of a concrete X that leans onto a cuboid concrete frame. Is it a sculpture? A monument? Is it the first part of an Astrominium-like edifice? More work apparently lies in store, because there's a bulldozer on site and a large pile of black dirt partially covered by a tarpaulin. There's also a portable toilet. The indistinctness of what's going on is only deepened by the activity I've seen down there. Basically, from time to time a dozen management types in suits and dishdashas stand around and have a grinning conversation. Not one of them pays any attention to the structure. Then they leave. I keep waiting for construction crews to come in and take the project—which I have called Project X—forward to the next stage; it never happens. The structure remains inscrutable as Stonehenge. Nor does www.Astrominium.com any help: all we get is the assertion, by now more than two years old, that the “building” of a “building” will “soon” be under way. This doesn't sound even linguistically right. It is unclear to me how the creation of a residential proposition suitable for Privilege Bay can be described as “building” a “building.”

I've got to find out what's going on. If the Astrominium plot isn't developed soon, and in accordance with the Excellence Ethos, the Privileged Three are sunk.

I do what I pretty much always do in Dubai when I need to know something. I ask Ali.

That's a Dubai joke—"ask Ali." When I first arrived here, I was given a couple of how-to books. The first was a how-to-work-with-Arabs guide titled *Don't They Know It's Friday?* The second was *Ask Ali*, on the cover of which the eponymous Ali, a cartoon individual in dishdash, leans toward the reader, the back of his hand concealing his mouth, and mutters "Psst ...". I permit myself a good laugh about the premise of *Ask Ali*, which is that, in order to learn about life in Dubai, you should follow a hissing informant to a hole-and-corner rendezvous where only things that are already matters of public knowledge will be disclosed to you on a hush-hush basis. Thus Ali will whisper in your ear about the local climate (hot voltage (220), and body language:

Whenever you see two [Middle Eastern] people speaking loudly or pointing at each other, relax and remember they are probably just chitchatting and having a good time.

I found my Ali, if I may be so possessive, soon after I moved into The Situation. I needed someone to fix me up with a personal VPN. A virtual private network, more than one expat had assured me, was the best and safest way to access Skype and other websites blocked by the U.A.E. authorities. (Here the eyebrows of the expat would rise. Their import was not lost on me. I was really quite excited about re-connecting with the porn sites that, in my last U.S.A. years, had given me what felt like near-essential sustenance, presumably with Jenn's blessing, because she (who had once accused me of expecting her to be my "concubine") was clearly counting on me (as I was on her) to be ninety-seven or ninety-eight percent sexually self-sufficient, and must have understood that self-sufficiency of this kind would very possibly involve recourse to dirty movies. Even if she wasn't—even if Jenn was under the illusion that sexuality, like water left standing in a pot for years, somehow disappears over time—the surreptitiously making use of porn was clearly preferable to "going outside the relationship" and creating a serious risk of emotional injury to Jenn and/or the third party. (There remained, of course, the problem of the welfare of the erotic performers. Any anxiety I might have felt on their behalf was eliminated almost completely by my preference for what seemed to be husband-and-wife porno acts (often mask-wearing or otherwise incognito) which gave the impression, accepted by me as bona fide, of offering up their intimate doings for moneymaking reasons, certainly, but on a voluntary and fun and expressly "amateur" basis. In fact, if I felt guilty it was on account of my decision to not subscribe to these sites but instead to jerk off as a freeloader and so take the benefit of the product without doing the decent thing of compensating the entertainers for their valuable if hobbyistic efforts. I did not lose sleep over this wrong, it must be admitted, if it was a wrong, which isn't admitted. (Ideally, I should have found a way to content myself exclusively with cartoon porn, which is quite sophisticated in this day and age of digital technology, and in principle enables the viewer to erotically fuel him/herself without any question arising of humans being harmed in the course of the filming. But what can I say? I'm a flesh-and-blood kind of person, and I'm really not turned on by the animation of certain scientifically impossible and/or violent scenarios, e.g., the rapture of human women by reptilian extra-planetary creatures, or the rape of cartoon women by cartoon rapists.)))

At any rate, someone was recommended to me for the purpose of installing an illegal internet connection in my apartment. To my surprise, this person, Ali, was an Emirati—

surprise because Emiratis (so I had been given to understand) were protected from the socioeconomic factors that incentivize a person to undertake relatively menial work or, for that matter, to exert him- or herself in order to make a living, the upshot of which protection (according to expat lore) was a nation afflicted thoroughly by a peculiarly cheerful form of Bartlebyism. In substantiation of this stereotype, the only U.A.E. national I could claim to know, Mahmud, who officially functions as the “local service agent” of Batros Family Office (Dubai) Ltd. and bears technical responsibility for the getting of licenses, visas, labor cards, etc., was never to be found or, if to be found, failed to turn up for meetings or, if he did, turned up at his own convenience and in his own sweet time and to no effect. Mahmud was put on the payroll by Sandro Batros on account of his professed *wasta*—his clout with the Emirati authorities. To this day Mahmud, who is always good-natured and pleased about things, has yet to procure a single useful piece of paper. His workload consists, as far as I can tell, of accepting his Batros emoluments and hanging out with his pals at the Armani Caffè in Dubai Mall. I have spotted him there several times. He never fails to greet me jovially. Invariably he and his friends pointedly disregard a nearby group of standoffish Emirati young women who have not covered their pretty faces and whose head-to-toe black is offset by red or electric blue trimming. In order to make a powerful impression on the women they’re ignoring, the young men always talk gravely on the phone and urgently input the numbers on their handhelds: each has placed two or three gadgets on the table. They work hard to generate for themselves a strong aura of possibility, as if the day were growing in excitement and they were in communication with some more interesting and important elsewhere and their interlude at the Armani Caffè was merely a parenthetical or trivial portion of some enormous and indiscernible adventure. Whether in fact there exists such an exciting, adventurous elsewhere—this remains an open question. The question is especially open in Dubai, land of signs everywhere: I have several times followed, in my car, signboards that direct you to roads that have yet to be built. Your journey fizzles out in sand. (The sand is natural. This is the desert. Disintegrated rock secretly underlies everything. It’s almost nauseating to see the sand wherever the effort to cover it has not yet succeeded.) What’s more, because of the velocity and immensity of the infrastructural operations, such roads as have been built are subject to sudden closure or transformation, and even old hands and taxi drivers are always getting lost and turned around. The U-turn is a huge maneuver here—and maybe not just because of the chaotic construction projects. Rumor has it that, in order to promote official control of the population, the traffic planning has been modeled on the oppressive urban development that apparently typified parts of Eastern Europe in the communist days, and it is no coincidence to say these rumorers, that cross streets and turnoffs are strangely few and the driver who has missed his or her exit (very easily done) has nowhere to go but straight on, sometimes for a kilometer or more, until another interchange or roundabout finally permits a turning back, the total effect being a city in large part traversable only by peninsular, cul-de-sac-like routes of benefit mostly to the security forces, for whom life is much simpler if everyone is corralled into a near-maze from which there is no quick escape.

A clarification: I’m not seizing on this stuff as a gotcha. It isn’t some great telling symbol of the shallowness and witlessness and nefariousness and wrongheadedness of the statelet. I do not align myself with the disparagers. I’ll always remember a certain Western visitor who ominously murmured to himself, for my benefit, My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings—

if the poem were at his fingertips and the dude had not fortuitously run into it while browsing online for some bullshit reason; as if he habitually carried on with himself a quotefilled conversation steeped in the riches of Western civilization and by patrimonial cultural magic bore in his marrow the traces of Sophocles and Erasmus and the School of Salamanca. Oh, how these bozos make me laugh.

As for Mahmud: who can blame him? Sometimes I feel like high-fiving the guy. Here is someone who accepts without anguish his good fortune. Here is the hero for our times.

But Ali was the opposite of a Bartleby—a Jeeves. He turned up punctually; did the humble work he was asked to do; charged a reasonable fee; spoke good functional English. All of that was estimable. Outstanding was that he took it upon himself to fix the remote control problem I was having with the ceiling fan and also, as I discovered after he'd left, to swap the bathtub faucet characters so that faucet C no longer gave forth cold water, nor F hot.

Fittingly, it was while taking my first bath drawn with alphabetic correctness that I had my one solid-gold Dubai brainwave: I decided to hire Ali full-time, as my personal assistant. He has proven himself the perfect man for the job, which may be described as follows: to assist me with the challenge of day-to-day life in Dubai consisting of one goddamned glitch after another. (For example, the aforementioned bathtub had a built-in seat. I can only assume that this feature is highly sophisticated and aimed, like everything else in this country, at the mythic connoisseur, in this case the überbather who sits up in his tub and will not rudely immerse his/her head and torso in bathwater, i.e., bathe. I mentioned my dissatisfaction to Ali, and my wish was his command. He and a workman procured and installed a new seatless, perfect tub.)

Even Ali is a glitch. Contrary to what his get-up led me to believe, he is not an Emirati. He is a “bidoon” (Arabic for “without,” apparently), i.e., a stateless person, i.e., a person who is everywhere illegally present. I have not inquired into the whys and wherefores of Ali's situation, but, according to *The National*, there are tens of thousands of bidoons in the Gulf States. Most Dubai-based bidoons, I read, are the descendants of foreigners (from Iran, from other parts of Arabia) who settled here before the United Arab Emirates came into being (in 1971, I can declare off the top of my head) and who for whatever reason didn't register as citizens of the new state. Neither *jus sanguinis* nor *jus soli* avails bidoons. They are, as things stand, fucked.

Anyhow, none of this would be my problem if employing a bidoon were not technically cloudy. At Ali's own suggestion, he and I have left things on an informal basis, which I'm comfortable with. Income tax is in any case not payable in Dubai, so no question of tax evasion arises. Because he is not permitted to have a bank account, Ali receives compensation in cash dirhams from my office disbursement account, and quite frankly I treat as a sleeping dog the compliance nuances of this arrangement. *Los dos Batros* have been informed in writing of the payments and their purpose. Sandro has been introduced to Ali and is well aware of what he does. Since it is customary in the emirate to employ bidoons, I can with justification proceed pro tem on the footing that all is hunky-dory or, since the case is not cloudless, that all is not not hunky-dory. That's good enough for me. One can't be Utopian about these things.

I call Ali into my office. I have taken photos of Project X and I bring them up on my desktop and invite Ali to take a look. Over my shoulder, he says, “What is this ... building?”

“That’s what I’d like to know. What do you think?”

This matter has no obvious bearing on my professional responsibilities, but I maintain the matter without Ali’s miscellaneous assistance I wouldn’t be able to begin to do my job.

Ali says, “I do not recognize this.” He says, “I will check this out.” What he means is, he will acquaint himself with the whispers and pass them on to me. I wouldn’t actually know anything, but at least I would be in the know.

“No, thank you, Ali,” I say. “That’s OK. Don’t worry about it.” Now I feel bad about having involved him. Ali is not, nor likely ever could be, a resident of Privilege Bay. He is never going to be one of the Uncompromising Few. He will always be one of the Compromising Many. My impression is that he lives somewhere in Deira, which is no great shakes but very far from the end of the world. I will put it this way: I am socially acquainted with people who have lived for a while in Deira. Ali has volunteered very little to me about his personal circumstances and I am not about to stick my nose where it doesn’t belong. (This is one of the great perks of living in Dubai: there are few places where one’s nose does belong.) Nonetheless, I sometimes need to remind myself that I didn’t write the citizenship rules and certainly didn’t provide legal counsel to Ali’s ancestors. I apprehend that Ali has applied for Emirati citizenship, but I haven’t kept tabs on what must be, I don’t doubt, a demoralizing process characterized by barely tolerable uncertainty, and I’ve never asked Ali about how it is going and don’t intend to. What it boils down to is, I can’t help it that Ali is a bidoon, and I can’t help it that being a bidoon is what it is.

I say, “Maybe we’ll talk about this another time. Thank you.” I am already intent on perusing my e-mails, as if there isn’t a minute to lose.

I doubt this performance sways Ali. He has seen for himself what my job entails, i.e., a couple of stressful hours of e-paperwork in the morning and an afternoon spent stressfully waiting around in case something should come up. The thought may have offered itself to him that I was crazy to quit what was, on the face of it, a secure and rewarding legal career at a good New York firm. (Ali knows a little about my old job, though he cannot be expected to appreciate what it means that I was of counsel, with a boutique but loyal private-client clientele.) I wasn’t crazy, though. The reasonable man, put in my position, might very well have made, or seriously contemplated making, the decision made by me.

White as an egret, Ali exits and shuts the door. He will take a seat at his desk, which is just outside my office, in the reception area, and productively busy himself. (Often he will read a book in English, in a private effort of self-betterment. The luckless fellow is not permitted higher education, and of course he cannot leave the country to seek his fortune elsewhere.) I swivel away from the desktop, put my feet on my desk, and hope my head is below the parapet.

IT MIGHT SEEM HYPERBOLIC to bring up the proverbial parapet, which calls to mind whistling bullets and, speaking for myself, the Alamo. I don’t think it is.

At first sight, my job looks straightforward enough for a man of my qualifications and experience. As the Batros Family Officer, I am expressly charged (pursuant to the provisions of my contract of service, which I drafted) with the supervision of those specialized entities that perform the usual family office functions for the Batroses. These entities are (1) the

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