Today I saw Maria Callas in *Norma*. Eyes ablaze, I could not really decipher what it was in me that enflamed so. I didn't want to give in, but for some strange reason I did. I went deeper than I thought, and it always happens to go that way. I always listened to opera and believed myself to be sophisticated and well-bred, but I cannot fathom how I came to be so impossibly dumb. I can be clever at times, but that does not prove the overall mishandling of my abilities as far as they go. I can say a word and a hundred and never mean any of it, but then again, I can convey a thousand of them in a single phrase and be mighty proud of it, too.

What do you think? I know it's rather unkind of me to speak to you in this way, fondly, like a person who is familiar, but I cannot seem to help it. Addressing a person in real life is much different. Then you start to lose the voice, becoming rigid in every waking moment. I am latent, a bit stifled in every way. Sometimes, I feel like there is a world that I have not lived in, but in my mind, it's not the one that goes beyond the boundaries of this one, but rather the very same—the very world we appear to have been born into without much crowds gathering to applaud us and congratulate our being birthed by human flesh, borne much the same.

I listen to the records; the voices that spring in my head are no longer mine. My hands write and write, and I cannot read what is writ from the hands that carried this rumination from my head, spinning in a circle, a magic circle that is bound to give me awful nightmares about being present. Cigarette fumes go up and down, and sometimes they form beautiful lines when the sunbeams lighten them up, and they seem tangible and visible—almost as if you can touch them, feel them with your fingertips, and leave their taste and scent on your hands forever.

Maybe we have been dreaming all this time of something disparate. Life's an unconventional piece of our existence, if something comes before it or after it. Like they used to say, if you have no recollection of the period before you were spawned here, then naturally you won't have any after you are gone. I always thought that somewhat grim—an unkind view to take for a species that is so hopeful. Then what do we have faith for? Is it some kind of wishful thinking? But then again, why are our minds so prone to imagine such states if they do not exist at all? If our fancy and ingenuity have limits, then why do we label things as nonexistent?

I was never able to answer any of these questions without sounding too much like the people who support either of those extremes. However, I sometimes found myself unable to commit to one or the other. I was very confused as a child, trying to bring the truth to my secluded life, as I grew up in a fountain of doubt and, on the other hand, the zeal and the unmitigated goal to prove to me that life has its purpose and that I should live to fulfill it. If Callas has lived to perform and gift her voice to the world, then what happened to that mission halfway through? Did it disappear, or come to a certain point where it was doomed for cessation? Aren't life's jollies and the talents we are blessed with too precious to be taken away?

I often troubled myself and thought that what little talents I was endowed with as a favor from the firmament should not and could not have been bestowed without a reason, and they could not have been limited or, to that point, without an end. It didn't make sense to me either, but I tried to rack my brain over the simple fact that the grace by which I have been exalted to another state, which might have been the lie I was told all my life, was too generous and at that too crude. Maybe I ought to have given my life, dedicated it to the passion that existed from time to time, and only for a little time.

I wished for a voice like the Frenchman who lay in bed, with his linen all over the place, and nursed himself back to health only to die in his bed, writing some three thousand pages or more of the life that I lived and he hadn't, for me to ridicule his pompous manner and be made incapable of repeating the same act; but why was I restricted to simply living it, when I could relate it to somebody else and make it possible for them to enjoy it, not only feeling it in the same fashion, but also in a nobler, grander way? I was not a child of someone with a stately home, nor did I go for a holiday to Venice as a child just to feed my enormous greed for all things beautiful. I couldn't enjoy the lives other people have lived before my time and was never made the subject of a lofty work that would be able to make me look like a Bacchus, a lordlier figure than I have been—a queen crowned with leaves, pointing her fingers into the oblivion to turn the void into a fright, quite like no other.

I could open a book and then return to the surface, repeating the words that have been said a thousand times before me: "I wish I could write like this." I could put stones in my pockets or die some other way to prove to the world that I too have been tortured in some way or the other, but my mind has been silent. It always grows reticent from time to time. Maybe my words are also confined to my mind, where they thrive and, like the child growing up in Combray, write seven books once every twenty years, but only until the light reaches them. From then on, it's a different story—a story of absentmindedness, a kind of literary amnesia that never leaves your bones and never lets the thought have its own vessel, to be born and die like we all do.