The Industrial Room of the Illania Hotel, Whiting, Indiana

James Hazard
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the Illiana Hotel, Whiting, Indiana

In Whiting it was a natural to name the hotel bar
The Industrial Room. Walking past, a summer night,
from a puzzling double feature about grownups’
romantic and murderous attractions, a laugh
spared out at me the way some friends
of my uncles laughed—loud and dangerous, thick
necked and something broken in the eyes, with
lots of cutting edges. The bar smell was sweet,
the way certain carnivorous plants are. The laugh
said, This is how you will be. I was a reader.
I loved the first half of biographies, when the subjects
were too young to be served in the Industrial Room.
The last half of the biographies was as boring or
threatening as the loud laughers my uncles brought
home. Whiskey numbed the fatigue of not knowing
enough and working too hard and you had to laugh
that loud to feel yourself doing it, you were that
numb. They were married to smart, good-looking women
who drank as much but laughed less, who were sweet
to a boy and seemed to say, with grown men this is as good
as it gets. God damn it, I prayed out on the buggy
summer sidewalk that night, what can a boy do to make sure
his biography’s as good in the last half as the first?

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