

TEN

*A change in the lighting.**The fingers of the left hand, still affixed to the chair, have become slightly more cramped. Otherwise, same as before.*

An urge to hurry  
 Came over me, an urge  
 To finish  
 The count quickly, get the damned thing done!  
 So what if the lower balcony was empty,  
 Barren,  
 Devoid of Mr. Three? So what  
 If I came up  
 With a different number than last time? What did it matter  
 If there were two  
 Or three  
 Or five or fifteen of us there? We weren't exactly  
 Great conversationalists—this was no lively  
 Social occasion—  
 Most of the time  
 We just walked around, doing our best  
 To ignore each other—I mean, it wasn't as if  
 One of us was taking up  
 A collection  
 To order out  
 For a fucking pizza! Just who the hell  
 Cared  
 How many of us  
 Dislocated and unsociable  
 Beings  
 Were stuck there in that goddamn station anyway?

*(Pause.)*

That was the catch: the one  
 Who cared  
 Was sitting in my seat, was myself, was Mr. Four,  
 The one who could not  
 Count himself  
 Who could hardly become  
 Himself until he—

Until I—  
Found and counted Mr. Three.  
There was a time, earlier in my life—  
Not that long ago but  
So separated  
From the present that it seems I'm remembering  
A different person—  
A time when uncertainty—  
Not quite knowing what was going on—  
Actually gave me  
Pleasure.  
You could have called me a connoisseur  
Of ambiguity, of novelty,  
Of the interplay  
Between prediction and surprise—  
I was a guy  
Who took delight in viewing optical illusions  
And sleight-of-hand  
Card tricks, in jumping  
Back and forth from one point of view to another, and this  
Enthusiasm  
Went beyond games and play—when it came time  
To explore  
A territory as seriously elusive  
As my own fears or failings, or another person's  
Desires—  
I would embark like an adventurer  
Paddling  
Through unmappable jungles  
Where the rivers changed course daily  
And the iridescent insect  
Landing on my hand  
Was not a pest,  
But a discovery.  
If indeed it was myself  
Who used to feel that way, if indeed I once  
Had an aptitude  
For extracting joy from confusion, all such feelings  
And faculties were now departed  
Stripped from me

In the chaotic swoop of changes, the turbulent  
    Churnings  
    Of something coming to a boil  
That had spilled over and deposited me, along with three  
    Taciturn strangers,  
    There in that cold dark terminal.  
    Now I hated  
    Uncertainty, hated the pervasive sense  
    Of senselessness, hated my own  
    Conviction  
    That I would never understand what the hell  
    Was happening—  
    Hated it  
    More than I hated all the locks  
    On all the doors  
And gates of that station, more even than I hated  
    The emptiness which swirled  
    Mockingly above me.

    And so, instead of hurrying  
    I slowed myself  
    Down—  
    First I froze  
    My gaze  
On the spot where it happened to be resting—  
    One of the marble pillars  
    Guarding the doors  
    Of the lower balcony—then,  
    With my neck  
    And jaw  
    Trembling from the deliberate  
Retardation, I slowly raised my eyes still higher—  
    In tiny  
    Ratchet steps  
My gaze moved upward—up along the marble  
    Pillar, up across  
    A painted  
    Ox-cart's wheel—  
Across the ox-cart itself and its load of hay—  
    Up at last  
    To the upper balcony, that final

And complicitous  
Rim  
Around the unforgivable emptiness.