

EIGHTEEN

A change in lighting.

His eyes remain closed. The fingers of the left hand, still affixed to the chair, have become slightly more cramped. Otherwise, same as before.

Time passed, I'm sure, while I pondered
 That image,
 There with my eyes shut. Soon it lost
 Its bright neon colors, outgrew its insistent
 Need to hold
 Center stage. It was dressed now
 In more plausible
 Hues, the rich warm tones
 Appropriate
 To a thing as old and expensive as I now
 Supposed it to be. To look at it
 Now, I had to direct
 My gaze down to where
 I had really seen it, to where its weight
 Still pulled
 At my wearying arm.

I was beginning to enjoy
 Looking at things this way, untroubled
 By all those extra
 Photons
 That barrage your brain when your eyes are open:
 Now, with my eyes closed, things were coming
 Into focus: now I could see
 Not only
 My hand, but my legs, my feet,
 The bench—
 The other benches—the marble covered
 Walls—the pillars—
 The yellow-green
 Lockers down there in the distance—the entire
 Station, in fact, could now
 Be seen—

Now revealed itself
 To be much smaller than I remembered, and more
 Crudely rendered, or more crumbling

From age and disrepair.
The newsstand was missing!—the wall behind it
Torn out, the gaping hole
Partly tacked over with stenciled sheets
Of the cheapest
Pressboard—and it wasn't just the newsstand—at least
Three of the marble
Pillars had been removed, their places
Taken, the loads of the heavy
Balconies borne
By a system of rusty
Winches and scaffolds—and the clocks—
Those giant, presiding
Enantiomorphic
Moons—they no longer told
The same time!

The clocks reminded
Me of Miss Two
So I aimed my attention to the place
Where I remembered
Her sitting, filled with a sudden
Comparative
Curiosity as to the fate of her
Extremities.
I looked over to where she ought to be, tried
To remember
What she looked like—her face,
Her neat clothes, her metaphysical
Stare—
But all I could see
Was her sturdy plaid luggage, that harmonic
Series
Of ascending volumes, that subdivided
Wardrobe, still arranged
In order
On an otherwise empty bench.

In the row
Behind me, across the aisle to my right—
It was the same story: possessions
Present, human

Absent.
The executive gym bag
Still showed
The indentation
Of Mr. One's unrestful head, but the recumbent
Body, the squirming
Businessman
Was now gone. I looked up
At the swirling nothingness, the precarious
Emptiness,
The massive non-entity
Poised above me and I thought:

"Of course!
I get it! It's the avalanche—
The emptiness has started to fall
In chunks—
It's taking out each sentient being, consuming us, one
By one!"

Oddly enough, I felt
My hatred ebbing—I mean, as I considered
The imminent dissolution
Of my separate, striving self, I felt
I was ready
At last to make peace
With the majestic, impersonal
Forces that besieged me—with the unknown
Unwanted
Thing that had usurped
My hand—with the inexorable
Emptiness—with silence and solitude and the slipperiness
Of numbers—even with
My impending
Demise.

I looked up toward that cavity
As if to say,
"Okay, I'm almost ready. I have only
One question:
I just want to know—"

But just then I felt
A presence beside me—a warmth,
A whiff
Of perfume and then
A woman's voice
Saying
"Excuse me, I couldn't help noticing
Your beautiful
Instrument. It's very rare
Very precious
And in wonderful condition. But you know that.
May I sit down?"