

TWENTY-ONE

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.

And so, for some time now,
 I've been alone,
 Undisturbed
 By the presence or absence, the desire
 Or disgust
 Of any overnight companions. The train station is still
 Out there somewhere—at least I think
 It's still there,
 Leaning over me in the dark, a fading ghost
 Of a blueprint,
 The desuetude, the shabby and hollow
 Continuation
 Into this unwelcoming moment, of someone's once
 High-minded
 Civic dream. Now I devote
 Most of my attention
 To a make-believe set of bleachers
 I've erected
 Here before me and filled
 With shadowy listeners, the half-remembered faces
 Of people I once knew, to whom I pretend
 I am telling
 My story.

All my life, like everyone else, I always believed
 That beyond
 Whatever room I was in
 There was another room, or a hallway
 Or a door
 Leading to the street, that this street connected
 To other streets, and so on,
 Out across
 The city and the world. But now I can't help thinking
 How little
 One place differs from any other
 For someone with a burden like mine—how little reason I have

For even trying
To get up and move—I mean, the prospect of motion
Is now
So weighted with difficulty,
With the Herculean
Chore of dragging this dense, unwieldy
Hand along with me—well, I don't
Like to think about it—and the idea of a destination,
Of somewhere
To go to—
It just isn't very appetizing—it seems stale
And outdated, like some
Old leftover,
A moldy casserole I've found rotting in my mind.

"Now come on," I tell myself, "the world is full of places,
Street corners and bedrooms
And empty seats on buses and quarries
Filled with rainwater.
The reality of such places does not
Depend
On your capacity for getting there, or upon the shape
Or portability
Of this thing you call your hand."

But my voice sounds obtuse
And gassy
When I say that, like the voice of someone's
Uncle,
Solemnly reciting
An argument learned long ago in school—a rhetorical
Party piece,
Memorized but never understood,
Now dredged up to score
A fatuous point
In cocktail conversation.

Of course I remember other places—better, in fact
Than I remember
Other people—it's just that my journey
Through all the places of my life now feels categorically
One-way,
As irreversible

As my journey through time. To think that I
 Could just get up
 And go
 To another place, that other places
 Are still out there
Right now, in the present, just waiting
 To be gotten-up-and-gone-to—
 Frankly,
That strikes me as a sentimental notion, exactly as foolish
 As thinking that I could, at my whim,
 Start life over and become
 A child again.

 I mean, it's obvious,
Isn't it? That for me there is only
 One
 Possible place—
 This place, where I am,
 This bench
Where I sit, where this monstrosity—
 My hand—
 Sits beside me.