

EIGHT

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.

There was One!
 In the row behind me, across the aisle
 To my right, stretched out
 On one of these long wooden benches, lay a man
 In a starched
 White business shirt
 And loosened tie, his executive
 Gym bag propped
 Behind his head for a pillow, squirming, as if he thought
 If he could just
 Try a little harder, he would tumble
 Into sleep. He looked
 Awkwardly familiar, like somebody I had met somewhere
 But didn't know—like an old girlfriend's
 Roommate's
 Boyfriend, from that larval
 Stage in my life
 When I had girlfriends who had roommates
 Who had boyfriends
 With whom
 I would be seated on sofas
 And left together in masculine camaraderie
 To watch
 TV.

And over there!—a dozen or so
 Rows in front
 Of Mister One's uncomfortable bed—in the first row
 Of the benches
 That faced the opposite way, facing
 Me, that is—
 There was Two! Beside her was a matched set
 Of sturdy luggage, a prim series
 Of proportional
 Building blocks
 In plaid, make-up kit to pullman, ascending step

By step up and away
From her demure
Right hip. She was sitting up straight, like a girl
In church, and she kept
Her eyes
Set straight ahead, fixed
On some object over my shoulder—it had to be
The giant
Clock at the end of the hall, the unreflected
Twin
Of the giant clock
At the other
End of the hall—I mean the one
I sat facing! I watched her as she sat there, obviously
Contemplating
The not-quite-detectable
Motion of the minute hand, and now then her own
Two hands,
At irregular intervals, would move out
Across her lap, smoothing
Her already
Smooth skirt.

As I cast
My eyes around the station, looking for Three, I congratulated
Myself on my ability
To seize
The appropriate moment.
Things were going well—this count
Was proving
To be even simpler
Than I had expected. And why
Shouldn't it be simple?
Counting a handful of people was a simple
Task, the sort of thing
One did everyday, the kind of mental operation
Any competent adult
Would take for granted. Of course there were four—
And only four—
Of us solitary companions
Spending the night in that station—
I knew that!

It was only the peculiarity—let's face it, the substandard
Nature of our overnight
Accommodations
That had caused me to doubt myself, to think
That I was a person
Who could not be relied upon
To count four people if those four people
Happened
To be milling
About. In the next
Two or three seconds I would certainly set
These doubts
To rest—
I would find him—Mr. Three, that is—a tall young man
With a backpack as I recalled—red-haired
And red-bearded, a Viking
Reincarnated
In blue jeans—and I would count him and then—
I'd remind
Myself to include myself—
And when I was done—well, I'd feel slightly
Sheepish—
That I—that anyone—could make such a fuss
Over such—
Such a simple thing.