

## NINE

*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.*

But as I looked down bench  
 After bench, as I stared into the shadows  
 Of pillar after pillar,  
 As I examined the opposite  
 End of the hall, where the benches had been replaced  
 By rows of yellow  
 Coin-operated  
 Lockers, I began to feel—well, I felt a little  
 Less self-satisfied.  
 Oh, I knew I was going to find Mr. Three—pretty damn  
 Soon, in fact—I didn't  
 Doubt that—after all, all I was doing  
 Was the sort of busy work you might assign  
 A newly hired  
 Apprentice, to check his accuracy—"Go ahead, young man,  
 Replicate  
 The results of this thoroughly  
 Well-replicated  
 Experiment. Take your time, sharpen  
 Your pencils  
 And keep your notebook  
 Neat. The best you can do is to tell us—  
 Precisely—  
 What we already know."

And so when I, who in this case was both  
 The master  
 And the apprentice, could not find  
 Mr. Three on the main floor, I lifted up my diligent  
 Head, and ran my determined  
 Eyes around  
 The lower balcony, with its dark, paneled hallway  
 That looped like a ribbon around the ellipse. I scanned  
 The twenty-seven  
 Locked doors, the doors whose handles  
 I had jiggled and twisted and shook, the doors

That implied  
The existence of an exotic, dangerous world—quotidian,  
Perhaps, and even dreary,  
To those who worked there—but for someone  
Like me, a place  
Unknown,  
And for that night, unknowable, only a few inches  
Beyond the reach of my eyes. There  
On the other  
Side of those locks  
Was a tract  
Of undeveloped epistemic real estate,  
On which my imagination  
Had already erected  
A low-budget  
Film-noir movie set—I could picture it  
In monochrome  
Detail—the camera prowling  
Through an elliptical warren of shadowy offices, linked  
By private  
Communicating doors—projective  
Geometry on the ceilings, cast by the speeding  
Headlamps  
Of the traffic below—  
Manila  
File folders  
Bulging with scurrilous  
Newspaper clippings and phony  
Import-export accounts stacked everywhere,  
On desks and credenzas—  
And the ingrained  
Cigar smoke  
Of the long-departed railway magnate  
Still offending  
The lungs of the small-time insurance agent's temporary  
Typist—  
Who probably—before she hurried off  
To teach  
Night school karate—  
Left the outside window open  
To air the place out!—the same hypothetical  
Open window

That would be no less the object of Mr. Three's  
Restless desire—than it had been  
Of my own.

Twenty-seven locked doors, all but one  
With a small  
Transom window mounted above, the kind I'd dreamt  
As a child of climbing through—  
But these twenty-six  
Windows glazed with wire-reinforced  
Frosted glass—  
These twenty-six transoms—  
Installed for ventilation, intended to tilt open  
And allow the escape  
Of rising  
Hot air—had in our modern  
Age of air-conditioning, long ago been screwed—  
Or painted—  
Permanently shut.