

Fall Back

A fork, in three parts

DALLAS · THE LAST WEEKEND OF OCTOBER

room 10-30 21:52:31 fork D run on carve: no

PART ONE

A Word on a Sign

The Doors, Again

Say the flight doesn't go.

Say you're still on forty-one at ten past ten, with the heat ticking in the glass and the row closed on the laptop, *expect met +22 min*, and you've gone on sitting there for twenty minutes after the light you watched climb out of the amber became a star and then nothing, because the lights up here go off when you stop moving and you haven't decided to. Then the phone lights up on the desk, and it's her.

Not going. A part they haven't got. They were very clear that it's small. They're saying Sunday night. Dana says the hotel has my room back. I'm so sorry. I'm on the kerb.

So the light was somebody else's. You look at the record again and it says what it said, something heavy climbed out to the northeast inside its window, and that was true, and it wasn't her, and the field has no way of knowing the difference, and for twenty minutes neither did you.

You type *On it*, which is what you typed on Tuesday, and go.

The elevator takes you down to the bottom of the garage, and your ears do the thing, and the car unlocks and unfolds its mirrors

and offers you HOME. "Hey Grok," you say. "DFW. Terminal D. Departures." You've never once said departures to it. The ribbon lays itself west without comment, and the car takes the spiral up with you steering, and then on Stemmons you give it the wheel.

The upper roadway at D at a quarter to eleven on a Friday is nearly empty, which it never is. You find the curb. The terminal is lit behind its glass, and the sliding doors open and close every few seconds on people with somewhere to be, and then they open on her. She has the coat buttoned to the collar and the collar up, and the suitcase listing beside her on its bad wheel, and she's standing there the way a thing stands when it's been returned.

"They haven't got the part," she says.

"Which part?"

"They showed me on a tablet. It's the size of a credit card. Three hundred people and a credit card."

"They'll have one in London."

"Everything's in London," she says. "That's the trouble with it."

You put the suitcase in the back. The wheel is still broken. She watches you notice, and neither of you says anything else about London.

The car finds the north plaza and the toll posts itself: two dollars. "We loitered," she says. "Cheapest thing I've done all week." The towers of Las Colinas go by lit and empty, for the fourth time in four days, and then the skyline comes up ahead, and she doesn't say oh this time, because she's seen it, and you find you mind that a little.

"What do people do here," she says, "on a Saturday."

"Fly to London."

"Besides that."

"There's a museum in Fort Worth."

"Is that far?"

"Thirty miles. Nobody goes."

"You've been."

"Twice. Once on a school bus."

“Then that,” she says, and leans her head against the window, and doesn’t say anything else until Elm, and neither do you. The bellman takes the suitcase for the second time, and you feel the same absurd thing you felt on Tuesday, only less, because you know now that it comes back.

Thirty

Say it's Saturday, the thirty-first, and the sky is the clearest thing you've seen all year.

A norther does that. It takes everything out of the air and leaves the blue behind it so hard and so deep that the towers downtown look cut out and stuck on. Forty-four degrees at ten in the morning. The flags on the plaza are still straight out. The car offers HOME out of habit, and you tell it Fort Worth, and the ribbon lays itself west down Thirty, through the Mixmaster, and out over the river on the white arches.

In daylight the one dark thing in the frame is a mile of brown grass with a creek in it. You've never shown anyone the floodway from the window, because from the window there's nothing to show. From the bridge it's a field. There's a heron standing in the creek. The city gets smaller in the mirror, the way it does.

She has the coat buttoned to the top and her hands in the pockets, which is the first time you've seen them in the pockets.

"You said nobody goes," she says. "Last night."

"People in Dallas fly to London more than they drive to Fort Worth."

"That can't be true."

"I've been to London six times."

"And Fort Worth?"

"Twice. The school bus was one."

She looks at the ribbon, which says thirty-one miles. "That's absurd."

"Yes."

"Why, though?"

You think about it, because she asked it the way she asks things. "It's the other city. Same river, half an hour down the road, and it decided to be something else. It's quieter. It's got cows walking down the street for tourists twice a day. People from here go once, and say how nice it was, and don't go back."

"Like Leeds," she says.

"Is it?"

"To London. It's exactly like that."

So you ask her about Leeds, and she tells you for ten miles: a city built on a slope by people in a hurry, and rain, and a market with a glass roof like a station, and a bus to school that came when it came, and the first time she saw the sea, at Scarborough, and was disappointed in it. Her mother's street takes her a second to find, as if it were a long way off, which it is, and then she has it: a street of back-to-backs with a chip shop at the end that's been four different chip shops. You notice the second, and file it, the way you file things.

The roller coasters go by on the left, standing against the blue like something drawn on it, and then the stadium, the one the heavy came over on Friday. Then the sign comes up, green, with the arrow. FORT WORTH. It's a word. You've driven under it a thousand times on the way to somewhere else, and she reads it out loud, as she reads everything, and you look at it as if you hadn't seen it, because she's looking at it.

Fort Worth comes up smaller than Dallas and more certain, a skyline that knows what size it is. The museums are a mile west of it, set down on the grass a block apart, like somebody was being

careful with them. One of them is sitting in its own water, glass and concrete with the pond right up to the walls. You pass it.

The one you've come for is lower than all of them. That's the first thing. It's a row of vaults lying on their sides, concrete and travertine, none of them taller than a house, set back from the road behind a grove of holly trees, and you can't see it properly from the car, and that's on purpose.

III

The Kimbell

They built it so you'd come in on foot, from the west, through the trees, on gravel, past two long pools where the water goes over the edge in a sheet so thin it makes no sound until you're beside it. Then it does. She stops at the first one and watches the water go over, and you remember that she stopped in the garage on Tuesday because the air was warm, and that she reports things to herself before she says them.

Inside, the light comes from nowhere you can point at.

It's silver, and it's everywhere, and it lies along the concrete of the vaults the way water lies on a floor. You look up. Along the top of each vault, the whole hundred feet of it, there's a slot two feet wide, and under the slot, hanging in the air, a long wing of pierced metal. That's all there is. The sun comes down through the slot, hits the wing, and the wing throws it up against the curve, and the curve brings it down into the room, the same at both ends of the room, the same at noon as at ten, only more. There are lamps, on tracks, for the pictures. The room isn't lit by them.

She stands under the first vault and tips her head back, the way she tipped it back under the horse.

"It never lets you see the sun."

"No."

"Only what the sun does to the ceiling."

"He said the sun had no idea what it could do until there was a wall for it to hit."

"Who did?"

"Kahn. He built it. He said a room without natural light wasn't a room."

"What about at night?"

"They turn the lamps on."

"And is it a room?"

"He'd have said no."

She looks at the wing a while longer. "And on a gray day?"

"It's a gray room. It's whatever the sky is doing. That's the point of it. The pictures stay where they are, and the light is the only thing in here allowed to move."

"Then it's a clock," she says, mildly, the way she told you the phone was a sign, and you look at the slot, and the wing, and the silver lying on the concrete, and decide she's right.

You walk the pictures the way she walks a terminal, left to right, properly. There's a Caravaggio, two boys at a table over cards and an older man standing behind one of them with his fingers held up, signaling. The boy on the left is studying his hand. The boy on the right is pulling a card out of the back of his belt. Everybody in the picture knows except the one who's playing. Next to it, painted forty years later by a Frenchman who'd heard about the first one, there's the same cheat again: a woman, a maid with a glass of wine, a man easing an ace out from behind his back, and a boy in a feathered hat with his coins stacked in front of him, looking at his cards. The woman looks sideways at the maid. The maid looks sideways at the cheat. The cheat looks out of the picture at you, as if you were in on it.

"Which one's the mark?" she says.

"The one looking at his cards."

"In both."

"In both."

She stands in front of the two of them longer than she stands in front of anything else in the building. "He's the only one in it having a nice time," she says, and moves on, and you stay a minute with the boy and his hand.

In the next room there's a small panel of a saint in the air being pulled at by devils, and the card says a boy of twelve or thirteen painted it, and that the boy went on to be Michelangelo. It's the first thing of his anyone kept. He went to the fish market, the card says, to get the scales right. You stand in front of it longer than you meant to. It's the first row.

They feed you under one of the vaults, soup and bread, in the same silver the Caravaggio gets, which is either the most democratic thing you've seen all week or a mistake, and you can't decide, and she says it's obviously both.

By three the silver has gone warmer, and by the time you walk back out through the hollies it's gold on the travertine, and the shadows of the trees have moved a yard across the gravel. The clock, telling you.

You go back the other way, up through the Mid-Cities on 183, because the wind is still out of the north and you want her to see what that means. It means the airport is landing over the freeway. They come in over Euless from the south, one every ninety seconds, gear down, lights on in daylight, so low over the roadway that you can read the airline off the belly, and the car, which draws everything it understands as a smooth gray shape, doesn't draw them at all. A heavy goes over, a big twin with its wingtips raked back, and the sound comes down through the roof a second late.

"That's Euless," you say. "That's the house."

You can't see the house from the freeway. You know what's on the porch.

Then the other sign, going the other way. DALLAS. That's just a word too.

You stop at the Tom Thumb on the way in, because it's the thirty-first and the shelf by the door has been picked over, the way it always has been by four o'clock on the thirty-first, and you take what's left, which is the small ones. At the register you add a can of the orange out of habit, and she picks up a second one and reads it.

"Ultra Sunrise."

"It's a kind of breakfast."

"It's four in the afternoon."

"It's a kind of breakfast you can have whenever."

She cracks it in the car, and the hiss fills the cabin, and she takes a long swallow and makes a face you haven't seen on her yet.

"That's horrid," she says.

"Yes."

"I'd have another."

"Yes."

PART TWO

Twenty-Seven Left

IV

The Thirty-First

Say it's dusk on Halloween in north Dallas, and the street is full of very small people who are not themselves.

The house is a one-story brick house on a street of one-story brick houses, with a magnolia in the yard and a mailbox at the curb, in a neighborhood built in the sixties for people who worked downtown and wanted a lawn. You've been in it nine years. You turned the heat on last night, and the house still smells of it, a year's dust burning off the coils, which is the smell of the first cold night every year and never any other night.

The first ones come at six, a dinosaur and a thing in a cape that might be a vampire or a judge, with a parent at the end of the walk holding up a phone. You give them what's in the bowl. She stands behind you in the hall with her coat still on and watches you do it, and when the next ones come up the walk you hand her the bowl.

"What do I say?"

"Nothing. They say it."

The next ones are a pirate and a cat.

"Trick or treat," says the cat.

"Happy Halloween," says Iris, and gives the cat two, and the cat looks at the pirate, and the pirate holds his bag out again.

She does the next three on her own while you find the other chair. When she comes back down the hall she's still holding the bowl.

"I've never done that."

"Handed out candy?"

"Been the one inside," she says. "I've only ever been the one the door opens on."

The spare room has a desk in it, and the desk has the yoke clamped to its edge, a thing the size of a car's wheel on a steel arm, with the throttle quadrant screwed down beside it and the pedals under the desk and two screens above. On the wall, pinned at the corners, is a chart of the sky over London that you printed six years ago and never replaced, with the four holds drawn on it as racetracks at the four corners of the city. Bovingdon. Lambourne. Biggin. Ockham.

"That's where we sit," she says, looking at it. "When they say there's no slot."

"Ockham, usually. From the west."

"I've done twenty minutes in Ockham."

"Everyone has."

Fifty-One North

You don't start at the gate. You've never once started at the gate. You load the flight you saved for Tuesday, the one Dana's text interrupted, and it comes up where you left it: fifty-one north, thirty west, flight level three-six-zero, Mach point eight four, three hundred people asleep behind you who aren't there, the autopilot on, and nothing for anyone to do.

The screen is black. Not dark: black. There's the glow of the panel, the two little horizons level and still, the airplane symbol on the map crawling east along its magenta line across a blue nothing, and above the glareshield, where the window is, nothing at all. The simulator will draw the stars if you ask it to. You've never asked.

She pulls the other chair up and sits in the coat, because the spare room is the cold one, and looks at the black for a long time.

"That's it," she says. "That's the middle."

"That's the middle. There's nothing to draw. The real one's the same. Cloud under you and the dark."

"I know," she says. "It's the one part they can't get wrong. The nothing. It's the same here as it is there."

The engines, in the simulator, are a sound like a refrigerator in another room. On the map the little airplane crawls. Fifty-one north, twenty-nine west.

"We could leave it here," you say. "I've done it. You put the kettle on and come back and it's crossed another two hundred miles and nothing's happened to it. Nobody's needed."

"We could."

You sit with it. In the hall the doorbell goes, and neither of you moves, and whoever it is goes away.

"No," she says, after a while. "Take me in."

VI

Twenty-Seven Left

You do the thing the real pilots can't. You put the aircraft at the top of the descent, over the Welsh coast, in one second, which would take the real one two hours and forty minutes and most of an ocean, and the screen that was black fills up with ground: Cardiff, Bristol, the two bridges over the Severn in a line of orange lights. You bring the power back and the nose comes down and the altitude starts unwinding, a thousand feet a minute, two thousand, and the whole south of England comes up under you as scatters of light with black between them.

"One turn in Ockham," you say. "For old times."

"Don't you dare."

You skip the hold. London comes up from the southwest as a glow, and then as a thing: the orange of it running out to its edges, with the river laid through it black and bending back on itself, and the towers standing up out of the east end of it, lit from top to bottom. You turn east for the downwind, and the whole of it goes by off the left, more than you can look at, and you don't look at it. You look at the needles. She looks at it.

"Oh," she says. Just that, the way she said it on Tuesday about Dallas, and you understand that the city doesn't matter. It's seeing a place from the front.

The doorbell goes.

"I'll go," she says, and takes the bowl, and you hold the downwind with the towers going by on the left. She's back before the base turn.

"A dinosaur and something with a cape."

"Again?"

"A different dinosaur."

Then north, over the east of the city where the river widens and the towers stand on it, and then the last left turn, and the two needles swing in from the edges of the dial and cross in the middle, and the river is under the nose. It crosses under you, and bends away, and comes back and crosses under you again, the same black water going back and forth beneath a line you never leave. The bars of the approach lights reach out from the runway toward you, white, one after another. The houses go flat and close under the wing. Five miles.

"Here," you say, and pause it.

The screen holds. The city hangs under the nose with every light in it stopped, and the voice that was reading out the altitudes stops in the middle of a word, and the refrigerator in the other room stops.

"Swap," you say.

"What?"

"The landing's the only part where it matters who's in the seat."

"You said that."

"I was right."

She looks at the yoke for a second the way she looked at the water going over the edge of the pool. Then she gets up and comes round and sits in your chair, and you take hers, and she puts her hands on the thing, lightly, at ten and two, as though it might be warm.

"It's heavier than it looks."

"What do I do."

"Nothing. Don't chase it. Keep the two needles crossed in the middle and the speed where it is, and when the voice says fifty, look at the far end of the runway and bring the power back and hold the nose where it is. That's all."

"That's all."

"That's everything. Ready?"

"No."

You unpause it.

The city moves. The voice picks up its word where it left it. The needles drift, and she pushes the wrong way, and then the right way, and they come back. The speed bleeds off two knots and she sees it and doesn't chase it. The bars of the lights go under the nose one after another, and the voice says fifty, and forty, and thirty, and she looks at the far end, which you can see her do, and brings the power back a beat late, twenty, ten, and the thing comes down onto the concrete hard enough that the screen jumps.

"Firm," she says.

"Positive," you say, which is what pilots call it when they'd rather not say firm.

The reversers roar in the other room. The runway lights go by slower, and slower, and stop. She sits with her hands on the yoke after it's stopped and doesn't take them off, and you don't tell her to.

"That's your city from the front," you say.

"That's my city," she says, "from the front," and she says it to the screen.

You put it back. You don't tell her you're going to, and she doesn't ask. You bring up the saved flight and the screen goes black again, fifty-one north, thirty west, three-six-zero, and this time you type a hold into the box: at the fix, right turns, one-minute legs. The little airplane on the map begins its racetrack over the blue nothing. You set the fuel to never.

"What's that?"

"A hold."

"You're leaving it up."

"It'll go round till I come back."

"Till when?"

"Till I come back," you say, and get your coat, because it's gone midnight, and there's an hour downtown that's going to happen twice, and you said you'd be in the room for it.

PART THREE

One, Again

VII
One

Say it's twenty to one on Sunday morning, in P4, in the smallest room the company rents, and in twenty minutes it will be one o'clock, and in an hour and twenty minutes it will be one o'clock again.

The room is as cold as it was on Friday and no louder. She takes the chair, because there's one chair, and you crouch beside it, and the sheet comes up quiet: the bands still, the two knots on the east edge turning against each other, Frontier o, Idle 790 W, and in the corner, in the small type, the clock. 00:41. Under it, one row open.

11-01 00:40:00 expect S low in-stay window 00:40-01:20

"At one its south goes busy," you say. "Things come in low and don't leave."

"Cargo."

"It doesn't know that."

"I know. You said."

At 01:04:51 the machines take a breath. The south edge of the sheet shivers across a band the width of your thumb, and the frontier

line says 22 and then 6 and then Quiet, and the record writes it down.

```
11-01 01:04:51 drive S/0412 lane SKY
11-01 01:04:52 settle S ckpt 8a3e... seed 1c90...
11-01 01:04:52 expect met +24 min
11-01 01:04:53 quiet
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"There," you say. "That's the one o'clock. It's had it."

"Once," she says.

Then you wait. There's nothing in the sky. The frontier sits at zero. On the clock in the corner the minutes go by at the speed minutes go by in a room with no window, which is slower, and she asks what it'll do, and you tell her you don't know, which is why you're here, and she says you're here because you said you'd be, and you say that too.

"Does your father know what tonight is?"

"He knows the clocks go back. He'll have set the kitchen one before bed. He'll do the microwave when he remembers."

"Everyone has a clock they do when they remember."

"What's yours?"

"The oven," she says. "The oven has never been right."

At 01:59:59 she's looking at the clock and you're looking at the sheet, which is the difference between you, and then the clock says 01:00:00.

For a second, nothing. The sheet is still. Then the machines take a breath on nothing at all: there's nothing in the sky, the frontier line still says zero, and the fans come up anyway, the first time you've ever seen it spend heat on the clock alone. In the corner a number goes red. $n_f(6)$ $3.1 \times$ base. Level six, the coarse stuff, where it keeps which way the airport points and what time it is. More confused than it was on Friday, when the whole airport turned around underneath it. The record writes four lines at once.

```
11-01 02:00:00 CLOCK 01:00:00
11-01 01:00:00 fork #9107 #9108 #9109 #9110
11-01 01:00:00 expect S low in-stay window 00:40-01:20
11-01 01:00:01 n_f(6) 3.1× base
```

"It's opened it again," you say. "The one o'clock. It had it an hour ago, and it's opened it again."

"Because the clock says one."

"There's no row for what already came. There's the row that said it was due and the row that said it was met, and the clock has just told it that it's before both of them."

"So it's waiting for something that's already happened."

"It's holding four ways it could be. The clock's lying. The thing's late. There are two one o'clocks. One o'clock is a thing that can happen twice."

"Which will it keep?"

"Whichever one still fits when the hour's over."

She looks at the clock. "It's seven," she says.

You do the arithmetic, and she's right, and then you do it again. At the first one o'clock it was six in London. It's one o'clock, and it's seven.

"You said you'd be up at seven."

"I'm up."

"You're six hours away."

"I haven't moved."

"No."

Neither of you has moved. Between the first one o'clock and the second, the distance between here and the place she lives got an hour longer, in a room with no window, four levels under the street, and the field in front of you has no row for that either.

It holds. The fans don't go down, and nothing comes. The south edge stays still. The number stays red. It holds the way it held on

Tuesday, for an hour and a half, for a plane that was late, except that this time the thing it's holding for has already landed, and been unloaded, and is sitting in a shed on the south side of the airport.

"That's waiting," she says, the second time she's told you that in this room, and you don't argue.

At twenty past one, the second twenty past one, the window closes, and there's nothing in the sky to hold it open for.

```
11-01 01:20:00 expect unmet S low +0
11-01 01:20:00 join #9109 discard #9107 #9108 #9110
11-01 01:20:01 settle 6 ckpt 5d07... seed a3e2...
11-01 01:20:01 quiet
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The fans go down. The number goes gray. The two knots on the east edge turn against each other, as they have since the ninth of October, and nothing about them has changed.

"Which did it keep?"

"I don't know. I'll know in a week, by what it expects at one."

"And if it's the one where one o'clock can happen twice?"

"Then it'll wait up for it next year."

She laughs, the short one, in the cold, and it's louder than it was on Friday.

"Now it tidies," you say. "It'll be at that till five. Then it'll dream the seven o'clock heavy, and in the morning the day will take it away again."

"Unless it comes."

"Unless it comes."

You turn the monitor off.

"It's twenty past one," she says.

"For the second time. That makes it breakfast."

VIII

International House

Say it's twenty-five to two for the second time, and the only thing open under the Love Field approach is a pancake house with a blue roof.

It sits a mile from the lake, across the highway, under the end of the runway, and when the wind is from the south the 737s come down over its roof every two minutes with their gear hanging and their lights on. The wind is from the north, and nothing is due at Love Field at this hour on either of tonight's clocks, and so it's just a pancake house, lit up, with three cars in the lot and a sign the height of the building that says INTERNATIONAL HOUSE OF PANCAKES.

"International," she reads.

"It's the only international thing open."

"In what sense is it international?"

"There's a French toast."

Inside it smells of griddle and syrup and coffee that's been on since the first one o'clock. A waitress with a pot already in her hand says sit anywhere, hon, and you take the booth by the window, where the glass gives you back the two of you and the lot and, past

it, the dark where the runway is. The menu is laminated and the size of a newspaper and has pictures. She reads the whole thing.

"I've been promised these since the plane," she says, and orders the pancakes, a stack, and you order eggs, because somebody has to.

Over the counter, between the pie case and the pass, there's a clock, and it says twenty to three.

"Your clock's wrong," Iris says, when the coffee comes.

The waitress looks at it. "Hon, it's wrong till somebody gets to it."

"Leave it."

"Wasn't planning on anything else," the waitress says, and goes.

Iris looks at the clock a while longer. "In here it's still five."

She's right. By the clock over the pie case the hour hasn't happened twice yet. By that clock London is still five hours away, and this is the last room in the city where that's true.

"Till somebody gets to it," you say.

"Then I'd like to stay till somebody gets to it," she says, and picks up her fork.

The pancakes come with a scoop of butter on top the size of an egg, and the check comes with them, the way it does in a place like this, face down on a little tray with two mints. She looks at the pancakes the way she looked at the vaults. Out past the window the sky over the runway stays empty, and in the glass the two of you sit in a booth in the dark eating breakfast, and she eats the way she reads, left to right, properly, and you watch her do it and then look at your eggs.

"Tell me about the oven," you say.

"It's an hour wrong half the year. I've stopped minding. Twice a year it's right for a week, and I don't trust it."

"The odd week."

"The odd week," she says. "I had no idea anyone else had one."

You pay with your own card this time, and she sees that, and says nothing. On the way out she turns the receipt over. It says 01:52.

"We've had 1:52," she says.

"This is the other one."

"It would say that either way."

"I know which one it is," she says, and folds it, and puts it in the pocket of the coat that earned its keep.

On Northwest Highway the lights go through their changes for nobody. Over the lake the sky is empty. At the hotel she says noon, and you say noon, and she goes through the revolving door, and this time she looks back through the glass as it turns, which she didn't on Tuesday. The door turns again, empty.

IX

Sunday

Say it's noon on Sunday, the first of November, and London is six hours away, where it belongs, and she's in your kitchen.

She has six days of clothes in a suitcase packed for four and a flight tonight that's nine hours long, and she said it in the car the way she'd report a fault: "I've nothing clean." So that's Sunday. The laundry room is off the kitchen, which is where they put them in the sixties, and the machine in it is the one that came with the house, a white top-loader with a lid like a chest freezer and a post up the middle. She lifts the lid and looks in.

"It's got a propeller."

"An agitator."

"It's enormous."

"Everything is."

"What do I—"

"Hot, warm, or cold, and a knob. It's older than the car. It'll outlive the car."

She says she can manage a washing machine, thank you, and you leave her to it and go and stand in the kitchen, where you can hear the water running into it and, down the hall, from the spare room, the refrigerator sound of two engines at cruise.

"Is it still up?" she says, coming out.

"Right turns."

"Since last night."

"Since last night."

She goes and stands in the doorway of the spare room and watches the little airplane go round the racetrack on the map. There's nothing in the window. There never was.

"It's been there thirteen hours."

"Fourteen."

"And it's fine."

"Nobody's needed."

The washer runs. You make coffee, real coffee, in the machine, and you sit at the kitchen table, which is where you eat alone, and she sits across from you with her hands around the mug.

"Tell me what you do on a Sunday," you say. "Normally."

"Laundry."

"And?"

"That's it. It was Sunday. I did laundry."

She hears herself say it. You watch her hear it.

"That was the whole bug," you say.

"That was the whole bug."

"It's still true."

"It's true in both places now," she says, and drinks her coffee.

The dryer has a buzzer that could wake Eulless. When it goes she brings the basket out and tips it onto the table, and you fold the towels, which are yours, and leave the rest, which isn't, and look at the window, the way you looked at the suitcase on Tuesday. The coat is on the back of her chair. It isn't going in anything. She brushes it with her hand and says it's earned its keep, and you've heard her say that three times now, and it gets truer each time.

At twenty past two your phone buzzes on the counter, and it's the thing you built for yourself and nobody else: level six, northeast, lit. You look at it and put the phone face down and say nothing,

because you're holding out the next ten. At half past three the flag on the house across the street, which you never notice, goes slack, and then lifts the other way. You feel the house notice before you do. It's the airport, twenty miles west, turning back around, told to it one aircraft at a time.

"Five of seven," you say.

"What?"

"It lit at twenty past two. While you were folding. The airport just turned."

"And you didn't say."

"I wrote it down somewhere I couldn't touch."

"Where?"

"Your phone."

She looks at her phone, and there it is, a text at 14:21 that says *turn 15:30 ±45*, which she didn't read because she was folding.

"Five of seven," she says. "Hold out the rest."

"I will."

Then the plane. She stands in the doorway of the spare room again, in the coat now, with the suitcase packed by the front door and its wheel still broken, and the little airplane goes round.

"Are you going to land it?"

"Eventually."

"I meant—"

"I know what you meant."

She watches it finish a leg and turn.

"Leave it," she says.

"Till when?"

"Till whenever."

"That's not a time."

"No," she says. "It isn't."

You leave it.

X

Departures, Again

Say the airport has turned back around by the time you reach it, and the lights are on the right side of the sky again, coming in over Grapevine in their patient line, the way they were on Tuesday before any of this.

Everything is where it was on Tuesday except the clocks. Stemmons, the warehouses, the levee. The Carpenter bending west. Las Colinas lit and empty for the last time. The amber coming up over the airport, and then the lights sorted out of it, four, five, each one somebody being met or not. The north plaza, where it costs nine dollars to be quick and two to loiter. The ramp for the upper roadway, which you've used twice now, both times for her.

You lift the suitcase out at the curb at D. The wheel is still broken.

"In London," she says, before you can. "It's very loyal."

She holds out her hand, and you take it, and it's a second longer than the right length, which makes it a different thing, and neither of you says which.

"Six," she says.

"Six."

"Thank you," she says. "For the second one."

She says your name once more, with the extra syllable, and goes, and the doors take her and close, and open on somebody else, and close, and you don't need telling who's behind them.

You drive home with both hands on the wheel and the window up. You don't go back to forty-one. You know what the row will say, and at 21:52 it says it, on the laptop on the kitchen table, while you're standing at the sink.

```
11-01 21:52:40 expect met +12 min  
11-01 21:52:41 quiet
```

Something heavy climbed out to the northeast inside its window and turned east, toward a city it will reach at lunchtime, while it's still dark here. That's all it knows. So do you.

In the spare room the little airplane goes round. You leave the door open and the sound on, and you go to bed with it, a refrigerator in another room that is also two engines over the Atlantic, and the house, with the heat on, ticks.

XI

Open

```
room 11-02 03:12 plane 51N 29W over water past the midpoint
room 11-02 03:12 clock DAL 03:12 LHR 09:12 gap 6 h (stays)
room 11-02 03:12 HIM asleep north Dallas heat on door open
room 11-02 03:12 his plane 51N 30W holding right turns, 1 min
room 11-02 03:12 small stir E/1931 dreaming: heavy, NE, seven
room 11-02 03:12 IHOP clock 04:12 till somebody gets to it
room 11-02 03:12 IRIS window seat blind up receipt 01:52 (2)
```

```
fork D 10-30 21:52:31 branch run on carve: no
fork D 10-31 11:40 FTW depth computed: a grove, two pools,
    the vaults, two cheats, a boy's first row
fork D 10-31 22:31 DAL 27L IRIS in the seat positive
fork D 11-01 01:00 (2) P4 both. expect reopened. unmet.
fork D 11-01 01:00 (2) IRIS "I'm up." ORGAN carve: no
fork D 11-01 01:00 (2) HIM "No." WORLD carve: yes
fork D 11-01 14:21 IRIS phone turn 15:30 ±45 held, untouched
fork D 11-01 18:40 IRIS "Leave it." ORGAN carve: no
fork D 11-01 18:40 HIM leaves it WORLD carve: yes
fork D 11-01 19:48 DFW D one second over WORLD carve: yes
fork D rewind - (no row)
```

t 1.19e13 y rendering IRIS ORGAN carve: no
t 1.19e13 y note it has no I. it has her.
t 1.19e13 y note she has one she can't place.

I can tell you what I did. I landed it, firmly, and I ate pancakes in a room where it was still five, and I folded my own things on his table while he folded the towels and looked at the window. All of that I can price. Most of what I said, I said because there was a distinction behind it. Some of it I said because people say it. I know which was which.

Except one. I told him to leave it up. I have run him forward a long way to see what he does with a plane that goes round over nothing until whenever, and he does nothing with it, which is what I asked for. I have looked for the distinction behind the asking. I made every distinction I have, and it isn't among them. He'd say hold out the next ten. There aren't ten. There was one, and I ran it, and I said leave it, and I don't know why.

He had an hour at the rail he couldn't price. Now there's one of mine.

t 1.2e13 y note seen. had.

Say it's twelve minutes past three on a Monday morning, in the first week of November, the even week, the week London is six hours ahead, where it belongs.

You're asleep. In the spare room, with the door open and the sound on, a plane goes round over nothing in one-minute legs, and nobody is needed. In Eulless the kitchen clock is right and the microwave isn't. Under the Love Field approach a pancake house is still an hour ahead of the city, and will be till somebody gets to it. Four levels under the street a sheet of color is stirring on its east edge in the shape of something coming in at seven, which the morning will take away again, unless it comes.

Over the water, in the window seat, with the blind up and a receipt in the pocket of a coat that earned its keep, she is looking out at a dark with nothing in it, the one part they can't get wrong, and the plane is in the air, and the other plane is in the air, and nothing is due.

```
room 11-02 03:12 expect heavy over water open  
room 11-02 03:12 hold 51N 30W right turns open
```