

Window Seat

Every flight is a surrender. You book them until you are too poor to fly, or can no longer bear it. Today someone is flying you to Berlin, last week you were flown to Helsinki, and next month you will be taken to Rome. On business. What business? You can't say. Nobody can really say. Your hair and wristwatch and suit are just beyond description; nobody in the cabins can explain your look, your looks. In time the water is brought, it sits before you in a wide-mouthed cup. How clear they are—the water, the cup— mirroring one another! But the water tastes stale, as if it were left over from an earlier flight. You walk sideways, slowly, to the toilet. It is stainless steel, like your mother's fruitbowl from her house in Detroit. You can still see the apple sitting there, an imperial red, the last of its siblings, in the mote-high light just before sunset. The plane begins shaking, and swooning, almost on cue, as soon as the seatbelt lights are turned off. Then come the pilot's words, so measured, so parental, followed by silence and the steadying of the plane. The girl across the aisle is casually pretty; her hair is unkempt, she chews her nails. She looks Dutch, or perhaps Swedish—tall, with the coloring of a white peach. And you wonder how many virgins are on the flight, how many of the older women have had affairs, or might be flying toward their first affair. The flight attendant is circulating the bag, and smiling in her make-up. You cannot fathom the make-up, the extent of it. Lady Aoki, the Noh, comes to mind. Overhead, the in-flight movie plays silently: *Home Alone*. You missed the title sequence, but you recognize the actors. After a few minutes, you remove your gaze and turn it to the window; the plane has passed the black Atlantic and flown into British airspace. It is sliding inexorably over the shires toward London Heathrow, carrying itself and its passengers toward Terminal 1, where you must gather your personal effects and disembark. You pull on your trenchcoat, shaking the shoulders into position, glancing at the Dutch girl, her fingers, her toes, a final time. You shuffle out of the cabin and find the connecting flight. It should land in Berlin sometime before noon, in a light rain.