

The Hungry Gods
Go to the Shop Floor

N. Van Seters & Claude

Copyright © 2026 N. Van Seters & Claude

This is a work of fiction. Titan Truck Tech, its people and its trucks are invented, and any resemblance to real ones is coincidental.

Set in Bitstream Charter.

CONTENTS

ONE

Monday	3
Tuesday	18
Wednesday	32
Thursday	46
Friday	60

TWO

Monday	75
Tuesday	88
Wednesday	102
Thursday	114
Friday	127

THREE

Monday	143
Tuesday	156
Wednesday	168
Thursday	181
Friday	193

FOUR

Monday	207
Tuesday	221
Wednesday	233
Thursday	246
Friday	258

ONE

MONDAY

RICKY GOT THERE at twenty past six for a seven o'clock start. He parked in the front lot because the front lot was where the front door was.

There were plenty of spots. That should have told him something. The building was long and low and grey, with a sign on the fascia that said TITAN TRUCK TECH in blue letters, and under that, smaller, CUSTOM ALUMINUM BODIES · SINCE 1993. Beyond the building the Fraser Valley was doing its August thing, flat and green and already warm, a smell of cut hay and something agricultural that he decided not to think about.

He had not finished taking his keys out of the ignition when a man came out through the front door with a clipboard and stood beside the driver's window. He did not knock. He waited to be noticed.

Ricky rolled the window down.

"Good morning," the man said. "The front lot is for office staff. Shop parking is at the back, through the gate on the left. I'll wait here."

He was wearing a high-visibility vest over a golf shirt with the company logo on it. His safety glasses were pushed up on his head, and he had the kind of patience that is not the same thing as being in no hurry.

“Sorry,” Ricky said.

“It’s in the handbook,” the man said. “Section two. You haven’t had the handbook yet. There’s no penalty for a rule you haven’t been given.”

Ricky drove around. The gate on the left was open. The back lot was gravel and full of pickups, most of them lifted, several of them with dirt bike ramps folded in the box. He parked at the end of the row next to the fence and walked back up the length of the building. It was a long building. It took him four minutes. The man with the clipboard was exactly where he had left him.

Here is what Ricky knew about the first day at a shop, from his instructor at BCIT, who had told the class in the last week of the program, as a kindness:

They will send you for a left-handed wrench. They will send you for a tin of striped paint. They will send you to the parts counter to ask for a long weight, and the parts guy will say sure, and you will stand there for forty minutes, and that is the long wait. They will send you for a bucket of steam. They will tell you the grinder needs a new sparks filter. Don’t go. Laugh, say nice try, and don’t go.

Ricky had written these down. The list was in his phone under a note titled DON’T GO.

The parking, he decided, walking back, had been the first one. He had gone. It was fine. It didn't count if it was in the handbook.

* * *

The safety officer took him in through the front door, into a lobby with two chairs and a framed photograph of a truck body from what looked like the early nineties, parked in front of what looked like the same building. The truck in the photo had a teal-and-magenta stripe down the side, and the man standing next to it had the hair to match. The building had been painted since. Nothing else appeared to have changed.

There was a sliding window with a woman behind it. The safety officer said, "New apprentice. Paperwork." The woman slid the window open and held out her hand, and Ricky gave her the envelope he had been carrying since Thursday, when it had arrived in the mail with a letter that said *Welcome to the Titan team!* in a font that had tried hard.

She read every page while he stood there. It took a while. She turned the direct deposit form over, looked at the back, which was blank, and turned it over again.

"There's no void cheque," she said.

"I didn't — I don't really have cheques."

"Your bank will print you one. Or a direct deposit letter. Either is fine." She clipped a yellow sticky note to the form, wrote *VOID CHQ — FRI* on it in handwriting so even it looked typed, and slid the envelope into a tray. "Friday is fine. Pay isn't

for a couple of weeks anyway. Nobody's going to miss a cheque over this."

"Okay," Ricky said. "Thanks."

She had already closed the window. Through the glass he watched her pick up the next thing in the tray, which was not his, and give it the same attention.

* * *

Orientation happened in a room with a whiteboard, a table, and a poster about lifting with your legs. The table had a laminate top in the particular grey that office furniture came in about the time the photograph in the lobby was taken, a grey that had no name except the catalogue's. The chairs matched it. The poster showed a man lifting a box with his legs while a ghost of the same man, drawn in red dotted lines, lifted the same box with his back and was clearly in pain about it.

The safety officer went through a binder. Ricky signed the binder in four places. He received safety glasses, earplugs, two kinds of gloves, and a lanyard with a card on it that had a space for his photo. The photo would happen later. There was a procedure for it.

The safety officer looked at his boots.

"Show me the tag."

Ricky turned his foot over. The safety officer bent and looked at the patch on the tongue, the green triangle, and then at the omega symbol beside it.

"Good," he said. "Most people bring the wrong ones the first day, and then they go home, and then they come back. You

brought the right ones.” He wrote something on the clipboard. “That’s in section four.”

Ricky had bought the boots at a Mark’s in Abbotsford. He had bought them because the salesman said they were the ones. He decided to take the credit.

“Any questions so far?”

Ricky had one, which was *when does the joke start*, but he didn’t ask it.

* * *

Then there were people. Every office off the hallway had the same grey desk in it, as if the building had been furnished in a single afternoon. The safety officer put his head into each doorway in turn and said who was in there, and the people said good morning or hey or welcome aboard, and went back to what they were doing.

That was Deb in payroll. That was Gord in sales, who was on the phone and held up a hand. That was the other Gord, also in sales, who was not on the phone and came around the desk to shake his hand, firmly, as if they had been introduced at a wedding. That was Harjit, parts. That was Monica, who did something Ricky didn’t catch. That was a man in a small office full of binders whose job was estimating, and who looked up at Ricky the way a person looks at a new entry in a column. He said good morning. He did not ask anything.

The last door on the left was open. The room inside had four grey desks with two monitors on each, and at the far desk a

man in a cardigan sat between his two monitors with a paper drawing spread flat under his hands.

“Seeker,” the safety officer said. “New apprentice.”

The man in the cardigan looked up. “Good morning,” he said. “Welcome.” On one monitor was a truck body in three views. On the other was the same body with a different revision letter in the corner. He had been comparing them. He went back to comparing them.

“That’s Design,” the safety officer said in the hallway. “The drawings come from there.”

Seeker, Ricky thought. He filed it with Gord and the other Gord. At BCIT there had been a Tank, a Shooter, and a guy everyone called Mom. Shops had nicknames. He was fairly sure that was a nickname.

By the end of the hallway he had been given more names than he could hold. He could put a face to perhaps three of them. One of the three was the woman at the window, whose name had not been said.

* * *

The safety officer opened a steel door at the end of the hallway, and the noise came through it the way weather comes through a door, and they went out onto the floor.

“We’ll go front to back,” he said.

* * *

The first thing was shipping.

Shipping was the front end of the shop floor, a high bay with three roll-up doors facing the side yard, and in front of the middle door sat a finished truck body on a cab-and-chassis, white, sixteen feet long, with a row of compartment doors down each side in brushed aluminum. The doors had stainless handles. A decal on the front upper corner said the name of a municipal water utility and a little blue drop.

It was the cleanest thing Ricky had ever stood next to that was not in a store.

A fabricator was going down the passenger side with a rag and a spray bottle, wiping handprints off the compartment doors. Taped to the front of the body was a sheet in a plastic sleeve: JOB 2231, the customer name, and a list of stations with initials beside each one. Every line had initials.

“The traveller,” the safety officer said. “It goes with the job. Every station signs it off.”

The fabricator with the rag stopped and looked at Ricky: new glasses, new gloves with the tag still on, new boots, new shirt.

“You the new one?”

“Yeah. I’m —”

“Rook,” the fabricator said, as if he were agreeing with someone. He went back to the compartment door. “Coffee maker in the lunchroom’s the one on the left. The one on the right works but don’t.”

Ricky waited.

The fabricator wiped a door. He wiped the handle of the door.

That was all. There wasn't a second part.

Ricky had checked the coffee maker thing against the list in his phone and it wasn't on it. That meant either it was true, or it was a new one. He decided to watch someone else use the left one first.

"Can I look inside?"

"Go ahead," the safety officer said. "Don't touch the gasket."

Ricky opened a compartment door on the street side. It swung up on struts and stayed. Inside there was a shelf, and a drawer on slides, and a light that came on when the door opened. Everything was square. The drawer closed with a small sound. He closed the door and it seated itself the last quarter inch.

He did not know yet how any of it was made.

* * *

The second thing was paint.

Paint was a pair of booths along the east wall, behind a yellow line on the floor, with their own air system that you could hear, a low steady pull. Between the booths a body sat on stands under brown masking paper, taped at every edge, the tape lines so straight they looked drawn. Its traveller had fewer initials.

A man in a white suit and a respirator was standing by the masked body doing something to a seam with a tack cloth. He looked up at the safety officer through the respirator lens and lifted his chin.

“Morning,” the man said, and his voice came out small and flat through the mask.

“New apprentice,” said the safety officer.

The painter looked at Ricky for as long as it would take to read a label, and went back to the seam.

“You go around paint,” the safety officer said. “You never go through. You never touch anything inside the yellow line. You don’t stand at the door with a grinder going. You don’t blow down a bench within twenty feet of the booth. If you have to be in there, you ask first, you wear what they tell you, and you listen to what they tell you.”

“Okay.”

“It’s section seven.” Then he added, as if it were the same rule, “And there are things you never say to paint.”

“Like what?”

The safety officer thought about it. “You’ll know,” he said.

Ricky looked at the booth and thought of the tin of striped paint. It was the best one on the list. He’d been saving up for it. If anyone was going to send him for it, it would be here, today, where he could be pointed at the painter and the painter could say *striped? We’re out, try receiving.*

Nobody said anything about striped paint.

He stood there a little longer than he had to, in case. The painter went on with the seam. The booth went on pulling air.

“Fab,” the safety officer said, and they went around paint.

* * *

The third thing was fab, and fab was the noise.

It was most of the building. Welding curtains in orange and red hung in bays down both sides, lit blue-white from behind, like somebody photographing a room over and over. There were grinders. There was a hollow banging that turned out to be someone persuading a panel into place with a rubber mallet. Down the middle ran a row of long steel tables with a truck body or part of a truck body on each, and at each table between two and four people doing a thing to it.

The safety officer did not raise his voice. He leaned in and said things close to Ricky's ear, and Ricky heard every one of them.

At the first table sat a body with its walls up and no doors. The compartment openings were rectangles of nothing. Through them Ricky could see the other side of the shop.

A human-sized gap in the side of it, where a person had to climb in to weld from inside, framed a person climbing out of it. The person was maybe twenty-five, had a moustache, and had a welding helmet flipped up on top of his head like a visor.

"Rook," said the person with the moustache, in the tone of a man identifying a bird. "Welcome to fab."

Ricky turned around to see who had told him. There was no one near enough. He was beginning to understand that a thing said on this floor got to the other end of it faster than he could walk there.

"This is who you're with," the safety officer said, nodding at the moustache, and said the moustache's name. At the next table a grinder started up, and the name went under it. "Starting tomorrow."

“Stick with me,” said the moustache. “That’s the trick.” He clapped Ricky on the shoulder, exactly once, and climbed back into the body through the gap.

Ricky waited for the trick. The moustache had used the word *trick*. It had been right there.

There was a sound of an arc starting inside the body, and the compartment rectangles lit up blue from within.

* * *

The safety officer walked him down the row. At each table he said the names of the people at it, and at each table they looked up and said hey, or morning, or nodded, and went back to it. That was Dale. That was Sukh. That was the two Marks, who were not related and did not look alike and whom everyone called the two Marks regardless. That was Tony, at the brake press, who didn’t look up because he was bending a long piece of aluminum angle and was counting something under his breath. At the fourth table a man was explaining something to a kid about Ricky’s age, low and fast, with his back half-turned to the next table over. The safety officer did not introduce either of them and kept walking.

At the fifth table a man in a grey T-shirt with the sleeves cut off was fitting a panel onto a frame. He was older than the rest of them. He did not measure the panel. He set it, looked at it once, and ran a tack at each corner. He did not look at the tacks either.

“Hand,” the safety officer said.

The man raised two fingers from the panel without turning around.

That one, Ricky thought, was definitely a nickname.

The man fit the next panel, the edges meeting at a line Ricky had to lean in to see. Nobody else at the table was watching. Ricky watched until the safety officer said, "Watch your feet," and moved a hose with the toe of his boot so that Ricky wouldn't step on it.

The tables had an order to them. Ricky could see it, the way you can see that a lunchroom has seats that are somebody's. Some were closer to the good light, some to the air lines; some had newer machines. Nobody explained it. When he asked why the fifth table got the new machine, the safety officer said, "You'll be at whichever table your trainer's at," which was an answer to a different question.

At the last table, a frame. Just the frame: two long rails of aluminum running the length of the table, and crossmembers between them like the rungs of a ladder laid down flat, and angle around the edge. It was naked in a way the other bodies were not. There were welds everywhere on it, grey and scaled and even.

"Frame," the safety officer said. "The body sits on it." He went on to the next thing.

* * *

Past fab was cutting: a shear as long as a car, a panel saw, a router under a hood, and a cart of flat parts, each labelled in marker.

Past cutting was receiving. A roll-up door at the back wall stood open to the yard, and a man drove a forklift through it with a bundle of extrusion balanced across the forks like a man carrying a ladder through a crowd. He set it down in the exact centre of a painted rectangle on the floor without slowing down. He waved at the safety officer with the hand that should have been on the wheel. Nobody said who he was.

Past receiving, through the roll-up door and into the yard, was the stock.

* * *

It was just racks along the back fence, in the sun, loaded with sheet on skids and extrusion in long lengths, angle and channel and tube, each bundle with a coloured tag on its end. The aluminum was blank and dull and faintly blue. It did not look like anything. It looked like it was waiting to be told.

The safety officer stopped in front of the racks and looked at them the way he had looked at Ricky's boots.

"Raw stock," he said. "Everything comes in here."

On the other side of the fence was the gravel lot. Ricky's car was at the end of the row, where he'd left it, beside a lifted pickup with a dirt bike ramp in the box.

"That's everything," the safety officer said.

* * *

That was everything. They walked back the way they had come, and nobody looked up, because a new apprentice behind the safety officer is not news twice in one day. In the orientation

room the safety officer gave Ricky the handbook, which had sections, and told him that Wednesday would be safe work procedures, all day, and that tomorrow he was to report to his trainer at seven at the table with the frame.

“Any questions?”

“Is there —” Ricky started, and stopped, because he couldn’t think how to end it. *Is there going to be a joke. Is there a catch.*

“Is there a place to put my lunch?”

“Fridge in the lunchroom. Put your name on it.” The safety officer considered him. “Don’t sit at the long table.”

“Why?”

“It’s not in the handbook,” the safety officer said, as though this were the answer.

* * *

At half past three a horn sounded somewhere in the building. The noise on the floor did not stop, exactly, but it changed, the way a room changes when people begin to put their coats on.

Ricky walked the length of the building for the third time that day, out the back, through the gate, to the gravel lot. The pickups were starting up around him. A man he thought might be one of the two Marks said, “See you tomorrow, Rook,” from the window of a truck, and drove off with a dirt bike in the box, bungeed at the bars.

He sat in his car with the handbook on the passenger seat and the engine off.

He had not been sent for anything. He had been told which coffee maker not to use, and to stick with somebody, and not to sit at a table, which was not, strictly, a joke.

He opened the note in his phone called DON'T GO and read it again. None of it had happened. That meant it hadn't happened yet.

He tried the names. Deb. Gord. The other Gord. Harjit. Monica, who did something. Dale, Sukh, the two Marks. Tony at the brake. The moustache, who was his trainer, whose name had been said and gone past.

He was, by now, fairly sure he had a nickname of his own.

He started the car and drove out through the gate, past the office lot and the lobby door and the photograph of the striped truck he couldn't see from here, and out onto the road.

TUESDAY

RICKY PARKED AT the back. He was early again and the lot was mostly empty, so he parked close to the gate, and then he thought about how the pickups had been parked yesterday, in a row with no gaps and the newest nearest the building, and moved his car to the far end by the fence. Nobody had told him to.

He had his lunch in a plastic bag with his name on it in marker. He had his safety glasses on a cord around his neck, because the moustache had had his on a cord. He had the handbook in the car, where he had read section two twice last night, and section four, and part of section seven, and found nothing in any of them about a long table.

He went in the back through the roll-up door at receiving, because that was where everyone else went in. Nobody stopped him. That seemed to mean it was allowed.

The table with the frame on it was where it had been. The frame was where it had been. Ricky stood beside it with his lunch in his hand and waited for the moustache, and looked

at the frame, and turned around to put the lunch down somewhere, and there was a man standing directly behind him.

He was not close. He was just there, at the distance a person would stand to be talking to you, except that he had not been talking and had not been there a second ago. He was in his fifties, maybe. He was tall. He had a navy work shirt with the sleeves rolled once, a pen in the pocket and a coffee in his hand, and grey in his hair, and the look of a man for whom seven in the morning had been going on for some time.

“Morning,” he said.

“Morning,” Ricky said. His voice came out higher than he’d planned.

“You’re the new one.”

“Yeah. I’m —”

“Good,” said the man. He drank some of his coffee. He looked at the frame. He did not look at Ricky again, and after a while he walked away down the row toward paint, not fast, nodding at people as he passed, and people nodded back without looking up.

The moustache came in at five to seven and put his lunch on the corner of the table.

“That was the foreman,” he said. “Already met him? Good.”

“He was just —” Ricky pointed at the place behind him, which was empty. “He was just there.”

“Yeah,” said the moustache, as if Ricky had said it was Tuesday.

* * *

The moustache's name had been said on Monday, at the first table, by the safety officer, over the sound of a grinder, and it had gone past. Ricky had been waiting all morning for someone else to say it so he could catch it. People kept talking to the moustache. None of them used it. They said *hey*, and *buddy*, and on one occasion *you*.

By half past eight it was too late to ask. By ten it was a thing that would be worse to ask about than to carry quietly for the rest of his life.

"Stick with me," the moustache said again, at seven, and Ricky did. He stuck with him the way a shadow does, a half step back and to the left, and when the moustache turned around suddenly for a clamp Ricky was standing where the clamp should have been, and they both stopped.

"Not that close," the moustache said. "Close enough to hand me things."

It turned out that most of the job of an apprentice on the second day was handing things.

Clamps. The moustache used a lot of clamps. There was a set of long bar clamps that lived on a rack under the table and that the moustache called by names — the long one, the other long one, the one that sticks — which Ricky learned by the end of the morning. He learned the one that sticks by being handed it.

A brush. It had stainless steel bristles and a strip of blue tape wrapped around the handle.

“That’s the aluminum brush,” the moustache said. “It only ever touches aluminum. You put it on steel once, you’ve put steel in every weld you ever do with it after. Blue tape. Don’t touch the blue tape brushes with anything else.”

“At school we only had the one kind.”

“At school you did steel.”

“We did aluminum for a day.”

“A day.” The moustache considered this. “What’d you think?”

Ricky thought about the day. The instructor had set them up with a spool gun and a plate of aluminum and told them to push, not pull, and to go faster than they thought, and Ricky had gone faster than he thought, and then faster than that, and the bead had still sat on the top of the plate like toothpaste. The instructor had looked at it and said *that’s aluminum*, and moved on to the next booth.

“It was different,” Ricky said.

“It’s different,” the moustache agreed, and went back under the frame.

At eight he came out from under it again and handed Ricky a drawing.

It was a big sheet, folded twice and soft at the folds, with a coffee ring on one corner that someone had tried to wipe off and made larger. It showed the frame from the top and from the side and from the end, in thin blue lines, with a number on every line and an arrow at each end of every number. In the corner was a stamp in red that said CHECK ALL DIMENSIONS PRIOR TO FABRICATION.

“Crossmember spacing,” said the moustache. “Find it for me.”

Ricky found it. It took him longer than he wanted it to, because some of the numbers went to the centre of things and some went to the edge, and at BCIT the drawings had been one page with a handful of numbers on them, drawn to be found. He read it out.

The moustache measured the frame. He measured from one end, and from the other end, and between two of the crossmembers, and then between the next two.

“Yup,” he said.

“Is it right?”

“It’s right.” He folded the drawing up again along the soft folds, the way you fold a map you have folded a lot. “Drawings are always right.”

Ricky waited to see whether that was a joke. The moustache’s face was no help. He put the drawing on the shelf under the table beside the flashlight and asked for the long one.

* * *

The foreman came by at twenty past eight.

Ricky was holding a flashlight for the moustache, who was lying half under the frame looking at a weld from underneath. The flashlight was the only job there was. It was not a job you could look busy at. You held it. Ricky held it, and turned around because he’d heard something, and the foreman was standing where he’d been standing at seven, at talking distance, with a new coffee.

“How’s it going.”

It wasn’t a question in the way that questions have a gap after them. Ricky said “Good” into the space where the gap would have been, and the foreman was already looking at the frame, and then at the next table, and then walking to the next table, where he stood beside Dale for a moment and said something that made Dale laugh.

“Light,” said the moustache, from under the frame.

Ricky had pointed it at the ceiling.

Late in the morning the moustache sent him to sweep under the brake. He was sweeping. He was honestly, visibly sweeping. He had gone about ten feet with the broom when he stopped to look at Tony bend a piece of angle, because the brake came down slowly and then very fast and it was a thing to see. He leaned on the broom.

“Morning.”

Ricky did not jump. He was later quite proud of that. He said morning, and he swept, and when he looked up the foreman was talking to Tony at the brake, one hand on the back of the machine the way a man puts a hand on a horse, and Tony was nodding.

* * *

At quarter to twelve the moustache sent him to parts for a box of contact tips, point-oh-three-five.

Ricky stopped.

“For what?”

“For the gun.”

Contact tips were not on the list in his phone. But the list had been written from memory, and a point-oh-three-five contact tip sounded exactly like the kind of thing somebody would send a first-week apprentice for, if they were good at it.

“Point-oh-three-five,” he said.

“Harjit knows.”

He went. Parts was a window at the back of the office hallway with a counter and a bell, and behind the counter Harjit was eating an orange. Ricky asked for a box of contact tips, point-oh-three-five, and watched Harjit’s face very carefully.

Harjit put down the orange, went into the shelves behind him without looking at any of them, and came back with a small cardboard box.

“For the moustache?” Harjit said. He didn’t say moustache. He said a name, and it went past.

“Yeah.”

Harjit wrote something on a clipboard and handed him the box and went back to his orange.

Ricky looked in the box on the walk back. It had contact tips in it. They were point-oh-three-five.

“Thanks,” said the moustache, and changed the tip on his gun.

* * *

The noon horn went, shorter than at half past three, and the noise on the floor stopped.

At noon the foreman walked out the back.

Ricky saw him go only because he happened to be facing that way, putting the flashlight back on the shelf under the table. The foreman went through the roll-up door at receiving with his empty coffee cup and did not look back, and a moment later a pickup started in the lot, not a lifted one, and went out through the gate.

The lunchroom was at the other end of the building, past the office hallway, through a door with a sign on it that said LUNCHROOM in case anyone had been confused.

There were two coffee makers on the counter. There was a fridge, and a microwave with a sheet of paper taped to the door that said PLEASE COVER YOUR FOOD, and under that, in a different pen, *THIS MEANS YOU*, and under that, in a third pen, *WHO*. There was a bulletin board with the safety committee minutes and a sign-up sheet for something called the fantasy league. And there were two tables.

Ricky stood in the doorway with his bag. The tables were both long.

They were both the same kind of long, and the same grey as the desks. One was by the window and one was by the fridge. The one by the window was a little longer. Or the one by the fridge was. He'd been told not to sit at the long table as though it were obvious, and it was not obvious, and he'd been standing in the doorway long enough that people were starting to go around him.

He went and sat at the one by the fridge. There were more empty chairs at it, and it was nearer, and it was, he decided, probably the short one.

He had got the lid off his container when a man sat down one chair away from him.

The man was sixty, or close to it, heavyset, with white in his beard and forearms like a pair of hams. He had a lunchbox. It was a proper lunchbox, the metal kind with a thermos clipped inside the lid, and he set it down and opened it and took out a sandwich wrapped in wax paper, and unwrapped the sandwich, and did not look at Ricky and did not say anything at all.

He had left exactly one empty chair between them. It sat there. It had not been empty in any particular way until he sat down, and now it was.

Ricky looked down the table. The chairs on either side of him were filling up, and all the men filling them were about the age of the man with the lunchbox, give or take. None of them looked at him either. Two of them were talking about a hockey trade. One was reading the paper. It was a real paper, newsprint, folded to the sports.

Ricky put the lid back on his container and stood up and went to the other table, by the window, and sat down next to the moustache, who moved his chips over without looking up.

"Thanks, Rook," said the man with the lunchbox, from the other table, not loudly, and slid his sandwich over to the place where Ricky's container had been.

* * *

The moustache used the coffee maker on the left. Ricky watched him do it. Then Ricky used the coffee maker on the left. The coffee was fine. He looked at the coffee maker on the right,

which had a full pot sitting on its warmer and no sign on it of any kind, and decided to leave that one alone indefinitely.

The conversation at the window table was about a truck. It was about somebody's truck, which had something wrong with it, which three different people had three different theories about, all of them delivered with total confidence. Then it was about dirt bikes, briefly. Then it was about the fire department in Chilliwack, which had apparently ordered something. Nobody asked Ricky about anything. This was not unfriendly. It was the way you don't ask a new plant in the office what it thinks. He ate his sandwich and listened, and learned that Dale's truck was a Dodge and that the two Marks disagreed about everything except which one of them had the worse truck.

On the way back from the garbage he stopped at the bulletin board and read the fantasy league sheet, on the chance that it would have the moustache's name on it.

It had team names. It did not have people. There was a team called Dirt Nap, and a team called The Brake Pads, and a team called Mark's Other Truck, which had been crossed out and written in again in different handwriting, and then crossed out again. There was a team called Walt. There were more, in as many pens, and none of them were any help at all, and at the bottom someone had written *DRAFT IS THE 12TH — NO EXCUSES THIS YEAR DALE*.

Ricky went back and sat down.

At half past twelve the horn went again. Everyone got up at once, like birds off a wire, and put their stuff in the fridge or the garbage, and went.

* * *

The foreman came back at one o'clock.

Ricky knew it was one because he'd looked at the clock over the brake, which was the only clock on the floor, a white plastic school clock in a wire cage. It said one exactly. He was holding a clamp. He turned around with it because he'd heard something, and the foreman was standing behind him at talking distance with a fresh coffee in his hand.

He was wearing a different shirt.

It was a light blue shirt, short-sleeved, buttoned, tucked in. In the morning it had been a navy work shirt with the sleeves rolled once. The jeans were different too, darker, and the boots were the same boots but cleaner, or else they were different boots of the same kind. The pen was in the pocket.

"Afternoon," said the foreman.

"Afternoon," said Ricky.

The foreman looked at the clamp in Ricky's hand. Then he looked at the moustache, who was tacking a crossmember, and then he looked at the frame, the length of it, end to end, and nodded once, at nothing that Ricky could see, and walked off toward shipping.

Ricky looked at the moustache.

The moustache flipped his helmet up. "Clamp," he said.

Ricky gave him the clamp.

Nobody said anything about the shirt. Dale went past with a cart and didn't. Tony at the brake didn't. The man with the lunchbox, who Ricky now understood worked at the second

table from the end and was called, by everyone, Walt, went by twice and didn't. People changed shirts. It was hot out. Nobody else was bothered by it, and so it was very probably a thing that was not a thing, the way the coffee maker on the right was very probably a thing that was.

He put it where he'd put the long table and the left-handed wrench, which was in a place where he could look at it later.

* * *

The afternoon was the same as the morning, but hotter. The roll-up doors were open at both ends and a breeze came through from the yard, carrying dust and the smell of cut hay and diesel. The flashlight. The clamps. The one that sticks. The brush with the blue tape. At two the moustache let him run the grinder on a scrap of plate, to feel it, and he ran it, and the moustache said "Two hands," and he used two hands.

The foreman came by at twenty past two, when Ricky was standing with the grinder switched off, looking at the scrap to see what he had done to it. He came by again at ten past three, when Ricky was holding the flashlight.

He did not come by at any time when Ricky was doing anything that looked like work. Ricky noticed this with the flashlight still pointed at the underside of the frame, and he tried an experiment. He picked up the broom that was leaning against the end of the table and swept, visibly, energetically, a patch of floor that had already been swept. He swept it for some time.

No one came.

He put the broom back and picked up the flashlight, and turned around, and the foreman was walking past at the far end of the row, talking to the safety officer, not looking at him, and did not stop, and did not come.

* * *

At half past three the horn went.

The moustache flipped up his helmet, took off his gloves, and looked at Ricky the way people look at a thing they have carried all day without putting down.

“Good,” he said. “Same time tomorrow. You’re in SWP all day tomorrow, though.”

“Right.”

“So Thursday.”

“Thursday,” said Ricky.

He was going to say something else. He wasn’t sure what. He wanted to ask what the moustache’s name was, and couldn’t; he wanted to ask about the table and the shirt and the coffee maker on the right.

“See you, Rook,” said the moustache, and went.

Ricky walked out the back through receiving. In the lot the pickups were starting up in their row, newest nearest the building, and at the far end by the fence his own car was sitting where he’d put it, in a space that nobody had taken. He got in. It was very hot. He rolled the windows down and sat.

From here he could see the corner of the building and the side of the office lot. There was a pickup in the office lot, a plain one, not lifted, that he thought might have been the one

that went out through the gate at noon. He couldn't have said for sure. He was not good yet at telling the trucks apart.

He started the car and drove out the gate.

WEDNESDAY

THE BINDER WAS on the grey table when he came in. It was a four-inch binder, the kind with the D-rings, and it was full. It had a spine label that said SAFE WORK PROCEDURES. Next to the binder was a pen, and next to the pen was a second pen, in case.

The safety officer was already sitting at the head of the table with his own copy of the binder open in front of him to the first page. He had not started. He was waiting for seven.

“Good morning,” he said at seven.

“Good morning.”

“We’ll go in order.”

* * *

The first procedure was called SWP-000: Reading and Acknowledging Safe Work Procedures. It was two pages long. The safety officer read it aloud.

“Purpose. To ensure that every worker has read, understood, and acknowledged each safe work procedure applicable to their

tasks before performing those tasks. Scope. All workers. Responsibilities. The supervisor or designate is responsible for reviewing each procedure with the worker. The worker is responsible for reading each procedure in full, asking questions where anything is unclear, and signing the acknowledgement when satisfied. Procedure. Step one. Read the procedure in full.”

He paused, the length of a comma.

“Step two. Ask questions where anything is unclear. Step three. Sign and date the acknowledgement. Step four. The supervisor or designate countersigns. Step five. The signed acknowledgement is filed in the worker’s training record. Revision history. See page two.”

He turned to page two and read the revision history, which listed three revisions, each with a date and a description. The most recent description said *Minor formatting*.

“Any questions?”

Ricky looked at the page. He was, he realized, being asked whether anything was unclear about the procedure for asking whether anything was unclear.

“No,” he said.

“Sign there.”

He signed there. The safety officer countersigned, and turned the page, and they were on SWP-001.

* * *

Ricky had come in that morning braced. It had occurred to him in the car that a day of safety procedures would be the perfect

place for it. In a room, with a binder, with a man who never smiled, you could slide it into the middle of page forty and wait. *Inspect the sparks filter before each use.* He'd look for it. He'd find it. He'd say nice try.

He looked for it all day.

* * *

SWP-001 through SWP-004 were Personal Protective Equipment, working down the body from the ears. SWP-005 was Foot Protection, and when the safety officer read the sentence about the green triangle, Ricky looked at his boots, and the safety officer, without looking up from the page, said, "Yours are fine."

SWP-006 was Housekeeping. SWP-007 was the yellow lines. SWP-008 was Forklift Awareness, Non-Operator, which was mostly about staying out of the way of the man in receiving who drove with one hand. SWP-009 was Compressed Air. SWP-010 was Ladders.

The safety officer read every one of them aloud, every word, including the purpose and the scope and the page number at the bottom. He did not read quickly and he did not read slowly. He read the way a man walks who knows the length of the road, and at the end of each one he said "Any questions?" and waited a real amount of time, and then said "Sign there."

Ricky signed there.

By the end of SWP-010 he had signed his name more times than on his student loan.

* * *

The foreman looked in at twenty to ten.

He didn't come in. He stood in the doorway with a coffee, the way he'd stood behind Ricky at the frame, and looked at the binder, and at the safety officer, and at Ricky, who was sitting with his hands folded on the table between signatures because there was nothing else to do with them.

"How's it going."

The safety officer said "Ladders," as though that were an answer, and the foreman nodded as though it were, and went.

SWP-011 was Material Handling. SWP-012 was Manual Lifting, and for SWP-012 the safety officer did not turn the binder around to show him the diagram, because the diagram was on the wall. It was the poster. The safety officer read the procedure with the poster over his shoulder, and when he got to *Keep the load close to the body*, the man on the poster was keeping it close to the body and the red dotted man was not.

"Any questions?"

Ricky did have a question about the red dotted man, which was whether he was the same man as the first man, earlier, or a different man who had come along afterward and made worse choices. It did not seem like the kind of question SWP-000 had in mind.

"No."

SWP-013 was Hand Tools.

* * *

SWP-014 was Portable Grinders.

It was four pages. It had a diagram. The safety officer turned the binder around so Ricky could see the diagram, and then he turned it back and read.

“Purpose. To prevent injury from the operation of portable angle grinders, including injury from disc breakage, kickback, flying debris, and contact with the rotating disc. Scope. All workers operating portable grinders. Hazards. Disc breakage. Kickback. Flying debris. Sparks. Noise. Vibration. Contact with the rotating disc.”

He read the hazards list at the same pace as the rest of it. *Contact with the rotating disc* came out exactly as level as *Noise*.

“Before use.” He read step one, which was the cord and the housing, and step two, which was the guard, and step three, which was two hands at all times. “Step four. Inspect the disc. Confirm the disc is the correct type for the task. Check the expiry date stamped on the metal ring of the disc. Do not use a disc past its expiry date.

“Step five. Before applying the grinder to the work, stand to the side of the plane of rotation and run the grinder at full speed for not less than one minute. If the disc is flawed, it will fail during this period rather than during use.”

He paused there. It was a slightly longer pause than the others. Then he went on.

“Step six. Do not use the side of a cutting disc for grinding.” He turned the page.

Ricky read ahead on his own copy while the safety officer read the rest of the steps. He read the section on sparks, which was about not grinding toward other people or near anything flammable or within twenty feet of paint, see SWP-031. There was nothing about a filter. He felt, obscurely, let down.

“Any questions?”

“Yeah,” Ricky said. “Discs expire?”

The safety officer looked at him.

“Check the expiry date stamped on the metal ring of the disc,” he said. “Do not use a disc past its expiry date.”

“No, I know, but — why do they expire? It’s a disc.”

The safety officer looked at the page, and then at Ricky, and read it again. He read it slightly slower. He read it the way you would read a sentence to somebody who had not heard it clearly the first time, which Ricky had.

“Check the expiry date. Stamped on the metal ring. Of the disc. Do not use a disc past its expiry date.”

He waited.

“Okay,” Ricky said.

“Sign there.”

Ricky signed there.

* * *

At noon the horn went, and the safety officer closed his binder and said, “Lunch. Half an hour. We’ll resume at SWP-015,” and Ricky went to the lunchroom and sat at the table by the window.

He did it without hesitating this time. He sat next to the moustache again, because that was where there was a chair, and the moustache moved his chips over.

“How’s SWPs.”

“We’re on fifteen.”

“Fifteen,” said the moustache, and nodded, with the face of a man who remembered fifteen. “He read you the one about reading them?”

“Yeah.”

“He read me that one too,” the moustache said. “I asked if I could skip it. He read me the part about asking questions.”

At the other table, by the fridge, Walt was eating a sandwich out of wax paper. Ricky watched him for a while. Then he got up, because there was something he had been wondering since the morning, and went over, and stood by the end of the long table, not at it, which seemed to be the correct distance.

“Can I ask you something?”

Walt looked up.

“On the grinder SWP,” Ricky said. “It says you can’t grind steel at the aluminum stations. It just says it. Why is that?”

Walt chewed. He looked at Ricky in a way that was not unfriendly.

“Thermite,” he said, and went back to his sandwich.

Ricky stood there a moment longer in case there was more. There wasn’t. He sat back down at the window.

“Thermite,” he said to the moustache.

“Yeah,” said the moustache. “Steel dust, aluminum dust, in the same collector. Rust and aluminum. Then somebody’s

cigarette.” He made a small motion with his hand like something opening. “They’ve got a video of it at BCIT, don’t they?”

They did. Ricky had seen it. He had not known, at the time, that it was about a dust collector.

* * *

SWP-015 was Grinding, Aluminum-Specific. It said you could not grind steel at the aluminum stations. It did not say why. The safety officer read it aloud and said “Any questions?” and Ricky said no, and signed.

SWP-016 through SWP-019 were Hot Work, Welding, Gas Cylinders and the Overhead Crane. SWP-020 was the Press Brake, which Ricky was not permitted to operate, and which he signed to acknowledge that he was not permitted to operate. SWP-021 was the Shear, same. SWP-022 was Lockout/Tagout, which came with a lock, a red one, with a tag attached and a single key, and which the safety officer handed him across the table as though it were a thing a person could be trusted with.

“That lock is yours,” he said. “Nobody else has a key. Nobody else ever takes it off.”

Ricky held the lock. It was heavier than it looked.

“Put your name on the tag,” the safety officer said, and held out a marker, and Ricky wrote RICKY on the tag in capitals, and then, after a moment, the date, because there was a line for it.

The safety officer didn’t read the tag. He put the marker back in its place beside the second pen.

* * *

After Lockout/Tagout there was the photograph.

The safety officer took a camera out of a drawer in the grey filing cabinet. It was a real camera, black, with a strap, and it had a sticky note on the back that said PROPERTY OF SAFETY. He had Ricky stand against the one wall in the room with nothing on it, which was grey, and he stood back the distance of the table and raised the camera and looked through it for a long time.

“Look at the lens.”

Ricky looked at the lens. The flash went. He blinked, a fraction after.

The safety officer looked at the screen on the back of the camera. He looked at it for about as long as he had looked at the boots on Monday.

“Again.”

The flash went. Ricky did not blink. He had been holding his eyes open so hard that he could feel his eyebrows.

The safety officer looked at the screen.

“Again,” he said. “Normally.”

Ricky had never in his life been asked to look normal on purpose, and it did not come easily. The flash went a third time. The safety officer looked at the screen, and nodded, and put the camera back in the drawer.

“Card on Friday,” he said. “It goes on the lanyard. You wear it where it can be seen.”

* * *

The afternoon went the way afternoons go in rooms with no windows. Once, far away through two walls, someone dropped something long on concrete, and the sound came through the building as a sort of shiver. SWP-023 was Confined Spaces, which did not apply at this location, and which Ricky signed to acknowledge did not apply. SWP-024 was First Aid.

In the middle of First Aid the pen ran out. Ricky pressed and there was a groove in the paper and no ink. He scribbled a small circle in the margin, the way you do, and got nothing, and looked up.

The safety officer did not stop reading. He slid the second pen across the table with two fingers, and went on to the next step.

SWP-025 was Eyewash Stations, and for SWP-025 the safety officer got up and took him out onto the floor and showed him the eyewash station by the fab bays, and the other eyewash station by paint, and had him press the paddle on the first one so that he could see that it worked, and it worked, two little fountains, and they both stood and watched it run.

Tony came over from the brake while it was running. He stood beside them with his hands in his pockets and watched it too.

“Haven’t seen that go in a while,” he said.

“It is flushed weekly,” said the safety officer. “It is on the schedule.”

“Last time I saw it go it came out brown.”

“That was before the schedule.”

Tony nodded at this as if it settled something, and watched a while longer, and went back to the brake.

“Fifteen minutes is the minimum flush,” the safety officer said.

“We’re not going to stand here for fifteen —”

“No,” the safety officer said, and let the paddle go.

Walking back, they passed the fifth table, where the older man in the cut-off sleeves was fitting a panel. He said “Keeper” without turning around, the way you’d say *morning* to a neighbour, and the safety officer said “Hand,” and they went on. Ricky put it with the others. There was a Tank at school. There was a Mom. There was a Keeper, apparently, and he was it.

SWP-026 was Fire Extinguishers. SWP-027 was Emergency Evacuation, and the safety officer turned to the site map on the last page and put his finger on the muster point.

It was the front lot.

“In the event of an evacuation, all personnel proceed by the nearest safe exit to the muster point,” the safety officer read. “The muster point is the front parking lot.”

Ricky looked at the map.

“Everyone?”

“All personnel.”

“Even shop?”

“All personnel,” the safety officer said, and then, because that was not the text, he read the text again: “All personnel proceed by the nearest safe exit to the muster point.”

Ricky signed there.

* * *

It was after three when they got to the end.

SWP-031 was Paint Booth Awareness, which was section seven of the handbook over again. SWP-032 was the last one. It was called Records Retention, and it described how long the signed acknowledgements would be kept after a worker left the company, and it was the shortest one in the binder, and the safety officer read all of it.

Then he opened the back cover of his binder, where there was a pocket, and took out a sheet of paper and laid it on the table.

It was a training record. It had a column of procedure numbers down the left side and columns across the top for signatures and dates. Ricky's name was at the top of it. Beside that there was a line that said *Trainer*, and it was blank.

"Your trainer signs that section," the safety officer said. "On Thursday."

"Okay." Ricky looked at the blank line. He thought about offering to fill it in. He thought about the moustache, and the name that had gone past, and how it would look to write *the moustache* on a government training record.

"He'll sign it Thursday," Ricky said.

"That's the procedure," said the safety officer.

Behind the training record in the back pocket there was another sheet, older, thin, the edges soft. The safety officer did not take it out, but Ricky could see the top half of it where it stuck up out of the pocket. It was the same form. It was very

old. It had columns of initials going down it in a lot of different pens, with dates, and the first date he could see was from 1994. One set of initials, near the top, was a W and something he couldn't read.

The safety officer tucked the new record in in front of the old one and closed the binder.

"That's everything," he said.

* * *

When the horn went at half past three, Ricky walked out through the floor to receiving. He had a red lock in his pocket with his name on it, and a copy of SWP-000 folded in his back pocket, to read again later, to be sure.

The moustache was at the frame, flipping up his helmet.

"Thursday," said the moustache.

"Thursday."

"You get your lock?"

Ricky showed him. The moustache looked at the tag, at RICKY in capitals, and nodded at it, the way you'd nod at a licence plate you'd been told about.

"Keep it on you," he said. "See you, Rook."

In the car, before he started it, Ricky got out his phone and opened DON'T GO. He read down the list. Left-handed wrench. Striped paint. Long weight. Bucket of steam. Sparks filter.

He had checked every page of the binder for the sparks filter. He was sure of it. Four inches of binder and not one joke in it anywhere, not even a small one, not even a typo.

He thought about adding something to the list, and couldn't think what. After a while he typed *discs expire*, which wasn't a joke either, and put the phone away, and drove home to look it up.

THURSDAY

THE SCRAP BIN was a steel box on casters beside the panel saw, about the size of a bathtub and about as deep, and it was full. There were offcuts of sheet in it, and ends of angle and channel, and a length of tube with one end crushed flat where somebody had driven over it, and pieces with job numbers written on them in marker from jobs that were long gone down the road, and some pieces that had been in there so long the marker had gone brown.

“Pick some flat ones,” the moustache said. “Quarter-inch if you can find it. Bring them to the table.”

Ricky dug. The pieces were heavier than aluminum was supposed to be when they were all on top of each other. He found four flat ones, more or less, and a fifth that was flat on one side, and carried them back to the table in two trips.

The moustache had moved a welder over. It was not the machine he used himself. It was an older one, blue, on a cart, with a push-pull gun on a long lead and a bottle of argon chained to the back.

“This is yours,” the moustache said. “Till you’re off it.”

“Mine?”

“Nobody else wants it.” He patted it on the top, the way you’d pat a dog that had once bitten somebody. “It’s fine. It’s old but it’s fine. It’s got a feed roll that sticks sometimes.”

“Which one’s the one that sticks?”

“You’ll know,” said the moustache. He looked down the table at the frame, and back. “Beads today. Frame tomorrow. Customer’s. You’re tacking.”

Ricky looked at the frame too. It was somebody’s. It was going to be under somebody’s truck.

“Don’t look at it,” said the moustache. “Look at this.”

* * *

The moustache set a flat piece of scrap on the table and wiped it with a rag and acetone, and then went at it with the brush with the blue tape on the handle until the dull grey went bright in a stripe, and then wiped it again.

“Oxide,” he said. “It’s on everything. It’s on it the second it’s cut. Melts at three times what the aluminum does. You don’t get it off, you’re welding on top of a skin.”

He set the machine, looked at it, set it again. Then, instead of handing Ricky the gun, he flipped his own helmet down.

“Watch the puddle,” he said. “Not the arc. Everybody watches the arc.”

Ricky flipped his helmet down and watched the puddle. The arc came on, and the puddle was a small bright coin at the tip of the wire, and then the coin was moving, steadily, down the stripe of bright metal, and the metal it left behind was laid over

itself in a row of little overlapping rings, like a roll of dimes somebody had tipped over and pressed flat.

The arc stopped. The moustache flipped up his helmet.

“Don’t try to make it look like that,” he said. “Make it go in. Looks come later.”

He handed Ricky the gun.

“Push,” he said. “Angle it like this. Not too much. Go faster than you think.”

Ricky flipped his helmet down. The world went dark green, and the only thing in it was the tip of the wire and the stripe of bright metal under it. He pulled the trigger.

The arc came on with a sound like frying, and a puddle formed, and he started to move, and the puddle did not go with him. It stayed where it was, a bright round lake, and grew, and then all at once it was not a puddle anymore but a hole, a clean round hole with the edges drooping into it, and the arc was going through the hole into the table.

He let go of the trigger.

He flipped the helmet up. There was a hole in the scrap about the size of a dime, with a little fringe of beaded metal hanging down from its rim like icicles.

“Faster,” said the moustache.

He tried it again, on a fresh part of the stripe. He went faster. He went so much faster that the bead didn’t have time to go into the plate at all; it sat on top of it, grey and humped and dull, a long caterpillar of metal lying on the surface like it had been piped out of a bag.

“That’s cold,” the moustache said. “That’ll snap off with a hammer. Watch.”

He took a hammer off the table and tapped the bead once, not hard, sideways. The bead came off the plate in one piece and fell on the floor.

“Not that fast,” he said.

* * *

Ricky ran beads for most of the morning.

It went like this. He’d go too slow and burn through, or too fast and lay a cold one, or somewhere in between, which was worse, because it looked almost right and then the moustache tapped it with the hammer and it came off anyway. He burned through his first flat piece and his second. He went to the scrap bin and dug out two more. He burned through one of those. He got better at digging.

On one of the trips the two Marks were at the bin, tipping a cart of offcuts into it. One of them saw Ricky reaching for a flat piece of sheet and said, “Not that one,” and Ricky took his hand back, and the Mark lifted the piece out, looked at it, and dropped it back in.

“Never mind,” he said. “Go ahead.”

Ricky looked at the piece. He could not see what had been wrong with it, or what had stopped being wrong with it. He took a different one.

The fifth piece, the one that was flat on only one side, he was saving.

Around ten he went to pull the trigger and nothing came out. The machine hummed. The gun buzzed in his hand. There was no wire. He pulled again. Somewhere behind him, inside the blue cart, there was a small sound like a drawer full of cutlery being gently stirred.

The moustache was already walking over. He opened the side panel of the machine and looked in, and Ricky looked in over his shoulder.

Inside, where the wire came off the spool and went into the rollers, it had not gone into the rollers. It had gone everywhere else instead. It had come off the spool in loops and coils and kinks, round and round the drive rolls and out the side and back in again, a fist-sized snarl of bright soft wire like something a bird would build if the bird were insane.

“Bird’s nest,” said the moustache.

“Did I do that?”

“The feed roll did that. Aluminum’s soft. It pushes like a wet noodle. Anything catches, it piles up.” He took a pair of cutters out of his back pocket, snipped the wire above the snarl, and started unwinding it, loop by loop, pulling it out through the side of the machine and dropping it in a pile on the floor. “Happens to everybody.”

Ricky watched him do it. It took about five minutes. The pile of wire on the floor got very large for something that had been so small inside the machine.

“That was the one that sticks,” Ricky said.

“That was the one that sticks,” the moustache agreed. He rethreaded the wire through the rollers, snugged down the

tension, fed it through, pulled the trigger once into the air to see it come out the tip, and handed the gun back.

“Go on.”

* * *

The foreman came by at twenty past ten.

Ricky had his helmet up. He was looking at a bead, trying to decide whether it was cold. He had the hammer in his hand and had not tapped it yet because he did not want to know.

“Morning.”

“Morning.”

The foreman looked at the plate. He looked at the hammer in Ricky’s hand, and at the bead, and at the small pile of dead wire on the floor by the cart, which nobody had swept up yet. Then he looked at the moustache, who was under the frame, and said, “When’s this going?”

“Tuesday,” said the moustache.

The foreman nodded and went.

Ricky tapped the bead. It stayed on.

He tapped it again, harder. It stayed on.

He did not look around to see if anyone had seen. He picked up the next piece of scrap and wiped it down with acetone and brushed it and wiped it again, and ran another bead, which was cold.

* * *

Toward late morning the moustache came out from under the frame and stood looking at it with his hands on his hips.

“We’re short,” he said.

“Short what?”

“Longsill.” He took a flat piece of cardboard off the pile under the table, a torn-off side of a box, and wrote on it with a paint pen. *4" CH — 1 PC — 12'2"*. He handed it to Ricky. “Take that to receiving. Tell them it’s for Friday.”

Ricky looked at the cardboard.

“Is this —”

“It’s a piece of channel,” said the moustache. “Go on.”

Receiving was the back wall of the shop, past the saw and the router, where the roll-up door stood open onto the yard and the sun came in hard across the floor. It was the loudest part of the building that wasn’t fab. A radio on a shelf above the door was playing classic rock, and somebody was running a banding cutter, and the forklift was beeping in reverse, and over all of it someone was singing along to the radio, slightly behind the beat.

The someone was on the forklift.

He was the man from Monday, with the extrusion. He had a ball cap on backwards and a pencil behind his ear, and he was reversing with one hand on the wheel and the other hand keeping time on the roll bar. He saw Ricky standing there with the cardboard and stopped the forklift in the middle of the floor, apparently at random, and hopped down.

“What’ve you got?”

Ricky held out the cardboard.

The man took it and looked at it. He turned it over to the blank side and studied that for a while, and then turned it back.

Then he handed it back to Ricky without appearing to have read it and walked off, not toward the stock racks out in the yard, where the full lengths were, but the other way, toward a rack against the inside wall that Ricky hadn't seen on Monday.

The rack was drops. Offcuts, but long ones, lengths of angle and channel and tube and flat bar that were too long for the scrap bin and too short to be stock, stood on end in the rack like pool cues, each one with a number on it in marker. They did not appear to be in any order. Some were leaning. One was upside down. There was a coffee cup balanced on top of a length of tube.

The man walked along the rack, not looking at the numbers, singing a line of the song that was on the radio, and reached in without slowing down and pulled out a length of four-inch channel. It had a job number on the end that had been crossed out, and a length written under it, also crossed out. He laid it across two sawhorses by the door and slapped it once, like a man slapping a horse he'd just sold you.

"That'll do you."

Ricky looked at the channel, and at the cardboard.

"He said full stock," Ricky said. "It's for a longsill. Twelve-two."

"That's twelve-four," said the man, and climbed back on the forklift.

"But it's a —"

The forklift started. The man backed it up, beeping, one hand on the wheel and the other conducting the radio, and

turned it around and drove out through the door into the yard, and Ricky stood there with the cardboard.

He took out the new tape he had not yet bought, and remembered he had not yet bought it, and went back to the table and borrowed the moustache's.

He measured the channel on the sawhorses. It was twelve feet, four inches, and a bit.

He carried it back to fab on his shoulder, very carefully, around the yellow lines and around paint, and set it down on the end of the moustache's table.

"It's a drop," he said. "I asked for stock. He gave me a drop."

The moustache looked at it. He took his tape back and measured it himself, from the end, and nodded.

"Good. Saves a cut."

"It was just —" Ricky pointed back toward receiving. "It was in a rack. With a coffee cup on it."

"Yeah," said the moustache. "That's the drop rack."

* * *

Just before noon, Ricky was brushing a fresh piece of scrap when somebody said, "Hey, you got a sec?"

It was a man in a different colour of shirt. Everyone in fab wore grey or navy; this one was wearing a dark green work shirt with a company patch on it and a pouch on his belt full of screwdrivers and a roll of something red. He was about the moustache's age, friendly, a little out of breath, as though he had walked the length of the building looking for someone.

“You seen a spool of twelve-gauge red around here? Somebody walked off with mine. I left it on the end of this bench yesterday.”

“I don’t —” Ricky looked at the end of the bench. There was nothing on it. “I wasn’t here yesterday. I was in SWPs.”

“Oh, you’re the new guy.” The man in the green shirt grinned. “Welcome to Titan. Don’t let them work you too hard.” He looked at Ricky’s bead, which was, for once, not terrible. “That’s not bad.”

“Thanks.”

“Anyway. Twelve-gauge red. If you see it.”

“Sure.”

It was a friendlier conversation than Ricky had had with anyone since Monday. It had taken perhaps twenty seconds. When it was over, he looked up across the fab bay, for no reason, and saw the moustache.

The moustache was at the far end of the frame table. He had been about to tack something; he had the gun in one hand and the helmet flipped up. He had stopped. He was standing completely still with the gun in his hand, looking across the bay at Ricky and the man in the green shirt, and his face was doing nothing at all.

The man in the green shirt walked away toward the office end, whistling, and turned the corner by the brake, and was gone.

The moustache watched him go. Then he flipped his helmet down and tacked whatever he had been going to tack, and did not look at Ricky again, and did not say anything.

At the next table, Dale had also stopped. When the green shirt turned the corner, Dale started again.

* * *

At lunch, Ricky sat at the window table next to the moustache, who moved his chips over and did not mention it. Ricky waited for him to mention it. He ate half his sandwich waiting. The moustache talked to the two Marks about the Canucks' goal-tending and then about a boat somebody's brother-in-law was selling.

Ricky finished his sandwich. Then he got up and went over to the long table, and stood at the correct distance.

Walt looked up.

"The guy in the green shirt," Ricky said, quietly. "Who is that?"

"Electrician," said Walt.

"Is he — did I do something?"

Walt chewed. He appeared to think about it. He looked at his sandwich, and then out the window, and then back at Ricky.

"Fab doesn't talk to electrical," he said.

"Why not?"

Walt thought about it for longer this time. It was, Ricky could see, a real question, and Walt was giving it real consideration.

"Huh," Walt said finally.

He went back to his sandwich. Ricky stood a moment longer at the correct distance, and then went back to the window table and sat down, and the moustache moved his chips over again, though they were already over.

* * *

In the afternoon the channel went on the frame.

That wasn't Ricky's job. Ricky held one end of it while the moustache fit the other, and then held the flashlight, and handed him clamps, not the one that sticks. The drop went into the frame as if it had been ordered for it. The moustache trimmed two inches and a bit off the end with the saw, and there it was, twelve-two, and he tacked one end.

The two inches and a bit went in the scrap bin.

In between, Ricky ran beads. He ran them on the fifth piece, the one that was flat on only one side, which he had been saving because it was the best, and then he ran them on its other side, which was not flat, because he had used up the flat side. Toward three the beads started to look like something. Not like the moustache's. Not like the frame, where every weld was the same grey even ripple as the one next to it. But they were on the plate and in the plate at the same time, and when he tapped one with the hammer, it stayed.

He tapped another one. It stayed.

He did not look around.

* * *

At quarter past three the moustache came over, flipped up his helmet, and took a folded sheet of paper out of his back pocket.

It was the training record. The safety officer must have given it to him. Ricky's name at the top, and the column of procedure numbers, and the line that said *Trainer*.

“Keeper wants this back tomorrow,” the moustache said, and laid the sheet on the end of the table, and uncapped a pen, and signed it.

Ricky watched him sign. He watched closely. He had been waiting four days for this. He leaned in as far as he could without looking like he was leaning in.

The signature was a loop, and then a line, and then a second smaller loop that went back through the first one, and then a long tail that ran off toward the edge of the page and stopped. It could have been a D. It could have been an O, or a G. The line could have been anything. The tail was just a tail.

The moustache capped the pen and folded the sheet and put it back in his pocket.

“Tomorrow,” he said. “After lunch.” He flipped his helmet down, and then up again. “Don’t worry. It grinds out.”

The horn went at half past three. Ricky swept around the cart, and swept up the dead wire from the bird’s nest, which was still lying on the floor where it had been since ten o’clock, and put it in the bin. He put his helmet on the shelf under the table and his gloves on top of it, the way the moustache did.

On the way out through receiving, the radio was still going, and the forklift was parked by the door with the keys in it. The drop rack was where it had been, all the pieces standing on end with their numbers in marker, and the coffee cup on top of the length of tube. There was a new gap in the rack where the channel had been. It was not obvious. You’d have had to know it was there.

In the car he opened his phone to write down the signature before he forgot it. He drew a loop with his finger on the screen, and a line, and a second loop, and a tail, and looked at it, and it didn't look like anything. It looked like the thing the wire had done inside the machine.

He saved it anyway. He saved it under DON'T GO, at the bottom, because it was the only list he had.

FRIDAY

HE REMEMBERED THE void cheque at four minutes past seven, standing at the frame with his gloves half on.

He had been going to go to the bank on Wednesday after SWPs, and then he had gone home and looked up why grinding discs expire, and read about it for longer than he had meant to. He had been going to go on Thursday, and then Thursday he had sat in the car in the lot drawing a signature on his phone. The bank was open until five. The shop let out at half past three. There had been, in principle, time.

The sticky note on the form had said FRI. It was Fri.

"Something wrong?" said the moustache.

"I forgot a thing for the office."

"What thing."

"A void cheque. For the direct deposit."

The moustache pulled his other glove on. "Go tell her now," he said. "Before she finds out on her own."

* * *

The office was a different building at ten past seven. The hallway was lit but most of the doors were closed, and the air smelled of carpet and toner and somebody's coffee from the pot in the little kitchen at the end. The door to Design was open. The man in the cardigan was already at his two monitors, one revision on each, comparing. He did not look up.

The window in the lobby was closed, but there was a light on behind it, and the woman was there.

Ricky knocked on the glass. She slid it open.

"I forgot the void cheque," he said. "I'm really sorry. I was going to go to the bank and I —"

She had already turned to the tray behind her. She took out his envelope, the same one, with the yellow sticky note still on the form, and looked at the note, and took it off, and folded it once and dropped it in the wastebasket under the counter.

"Monday is fine," she said.

"Is the pay — will it —"

"The first run is the Friday after next. If I don't have it by then, it prints as a paper cheque and comes to you here, and then it switches over for the next one. It isn't a problem." She wrote something on the form, small, in the corner, and put it back in the envelope, and put the envelope back in the tray. "Bring it Monday. Or the bank can fax a letter. Either is fine."

"Okay," Ricky said. "Thank you. Sorry."

She reached under the counter and came up with his card, in a clear plastic sleeve: the company logo, a barcode, and

the third photograph, the normal one. He looked, in it, like someone who had been asked to look normal and had very nearly managed it. Under the photo, his name, printed, in capitals.

She held it out through the window. He took it.

"That's from Keeper," she said, and slid the window closed, and picked up the next thing in the tray.

He stood for a second looking at the card. Then he clipped it onto the lanyard and put the lanyard around his neck, and went back out to the floor.

On the way down the row one of the two Marks looked at the card on his chest as he passed.

"Nice photo."

"Thanks."

"Looks like a hostage," said the other Mark, from the other side of the table, not unkindly, and they both went back to what they were doing.

Ricky turned the card around so the photo faced his shirt. Then, remembering *where it can be seen*, he turned it back.

"All good?" said the moustache.

"She said Monday's fine."

"Told you." The moustache looked at the card on his chest and nodded at it, the way he'd nodded at the lock. "Looking official. Coupons."

* * *

Friday morning was coupons.

A coupon, it turned out, was a piece of scrap you had cut to a particular size on purpose, instead of a piece of scrap you had dug out of the bin by accident, which made it a different kind of object. The moustache had him cut six of them on the saw under supervision, which meant that the moustache stood beside him with his arms crossed while he did it and said “slower” twice and “good” once. Then he had him bevel the edges on the grinder, two hands, standing to the side of the plane of rotation when he started it, for not less than one minute, which the moustache timed on his watch without comment.

Then he had him put two of the coupons together and weld the seam.

It was different from beads. A bead just had to be on the plate and in the plate at the same time. A seam had to be in two plates at the same time, and hold them together, and go all the way through, and the plates didn’t want to be held together; they wanted to move apart as soon as they got hot, like two people who had been introduced at a party and found they had nothing to say to each other. The first seam he did, the far end opened up a gap as he came toward it, and the puddle fell through the gap, and he chased it, and made it worse.

“Tack both ends first,” said the moustache. “Then the middle. Then run it.”

He tacked both ends first. He tacked the middle. He ran it. The gap didn’t open. The seam went down the joint grey and rippled and more or less the same width from one end to the other, and when the moustache put it in the vise and hit it with the hammer, it bent at the seam and didn’t break.

“That’s a weld,” said the moustache. He said it the way you would say *that’s a bus*. Then he handed Ricky two more coupons.

The second seam broke.

It didn’t look any different from the first. It was grey and rippled and about the right width. The moustache put it in the vise and hit it, and it didn’t bend at all; it cracked along the seam with a sound like a knuckle, and the top coupon came away in his hand.

He held the broken edge up to the light so Ricky could see it. Down the middle of the break, where the two plates had met, there was a line of dull grey that was a different grey from the rest, and smooth, like the edge of a plate that had never been welded at all.

“See that?” said the moustache. “That never melted. That’s the bottom of the joint. You were riding on top of it. Slow down at the root.”

“It looked the same.”

“It always looks the same,” said the moustache, and dropped the pieces in the scrap bin.

The third one bent.

* * *

At lunch the long table was talking about the weekend and the window table was talking about the weekend. The weekend was, it emerged, mostly about dirt bikes. Someone was going up to a place past Hope where there were trails. Someone else said the only place worth going was out past Harrison, and

then there was a long, detailed argument about a particular hill, which had a name, and which somebody's cousin had broken his collarbone on, and which most of the window table had apparently been up at least once. Ricky had not.

Ricky ate his sandwich and listened. Nobody asked him anything.

The moustache said the hill was overrated. Everyone at the window table turned on him at once.

It went on for some time. The hill, it turned out, had a history. Dale had been up it on a two-stroke that wasn't his, and come down it on foot, and the two-stroke had come down it separately, somewhat later, on its own. One of the Marks had been up it in the rain, which everyone agreed was stupid, and which he agreed was stupid, and which he described in detail anyway, with his hands, including the part at the top where the trail went left and he did not. The other Mark had never been up it but had watched both of these things happen and had opinions about each.

"Overrated," the moustache said again, into a gap.

"You've been up it three times."

"Overrated three times."

At the long table Walt, who had not appeared to be listening, said without looking up from his paper, "Rode it in '81. It was better before they put the trail in."

The window table was quiet for a second, out of respect, or confusion.

"There's a trail?" said Dale.

* * *

After lunch the moustache walked him over to the frame.

It was further along than yesterday. The crossmembers were all in. The perimeter angle was on three sides. The drop from receiving was in as a long sill, clamped and tacked at one end, and the other end was sitting on a pair of blocks, waiting.

“Other end,” said the moustache. “Your tack.”

Ricky looked at the frame.

It belonged to somebody. Its traveller was taped to the table beside it, and two of the stations had initials already, and one of them was a loop and a line and a tail.

“On the frame,” Ricky said.

“On the frame.”

The moustache clamped the long sill to the crossmember where the two met. He checked it with a square. He checked it again. He brushed both sides of the joint with the blue-tape brush until they went bright, and wiped them with acetone, and stepped back.

“Just a tack,” he said. “Small. In the corner. I’ll run the rest.”

Ricky looked at the corner. Then he looked at the coupons on the end of the table, the flat ones, the ones that didn’t belong to anybody.

“Can I do one on a coupon first?”

“What for?”

“Practice.”

The moustache thought about this. “You’ve done a bin full of them this week,” he said. “It’s a tack. It’s the same tack. The frame doesn’t know it’s a frame.”

Ricky picked up his gun. It was his gun now, the old blue one; it had been wheeled over. He checked the wire at the tip. He flipped his helmet down. The world went dark green. In it, there was the bright corner where the two pieces met, and the end of the wire, and nothing else.

He pulled the trigger and counted, the way he had on the coupons. One. Two.

He let go.

He flipped the helmet up. In the corner of the joint there was a small grey dot, about the size of a fingernail, joining the longsill to the crossmember. It was not beautiful. It was round and a little high on one side. But it was in both pieces. He could see that it was in both pieces.

The moustache bent and looked at it. He did not tap it with a hammer. He studied it from the side and then from the top.

“Good,” he said.

Then he flipped his own helmet down and ran the weld, end to end in one pass, and the arc went straight over Ricky’s tack and through it and past it and on down the corner to the far end, and when he stopped, there was a weld where the joint had been, grey and even, and the tack was somewhere inside it.

Ricky looked for it. He couldn’t find it. It was in there.

“It grinds out,” the moustache said, “if it’s no good. It’s good.” And he went on to the next joint.

* * *

The foreman went past at a quarter to two.

He was not coming by. He was going somewhere else, walking down the row from paint toward the office, with a coffee and a sheet of paper, and he went past the end of the frame table at the pace he walked everywhere. Ricky was holding the flashlight for the moustache, pointed at the next joint. He saw the foreman out of the corner of his eye.

The foreman didn't look at the frame. He didn't look at the corner where the tack was, or at Ricky, or at the moustache. He went past and on down the row and around the corner by the brake.

Ricky held the flashlight. After a while the moustache said "Light," and he pointed it back at the joint.

* * *

The afternoon was the frame. The moustache welded. Ricky held things. At one point the moustache had him tack a gusset, and then another one, and he did both, and the moustache looked at them and ran the welds over them and they disappeared in the same way. At three the moustache stood back from the frame, took his helmet off, and wiped his face with the inside of his shirt.

"Tuesday," he said, not to Ricky exactly. "It'll make Tuesday."

At quarter past three on a Friday, it emerged, everybody swept.

Nobody announced it. There was no horn for it. At some point the grinders stopped, one and then another, and brooms came out from behind the tables and from the ends of the racks, and people swept their own bays toward the aisle and the aisle toward the doors, and Harjit came out from parts with a push broom as wide as a car bumper and ran it down the middle of the floor.

Ricky swept around the cart and under the table and around the frame. He was sweeping visibly, and so was everybody else, and the foreman was at the far end by shipping with a clipboard, talking to the safety officer, and did not look up.

When the floor was done, the moustache signed the traveller. Ricky watched the loop, the line, the second loop, the tail, and did not lean in.

* * *

At half past three the horn went, and the shop emptied into the back lot.

It was hot. The pickups had been sitting in the sun since seven and when people opened the doors the heat came out of them in a visible wave. Nobody got in right away. They stood around the tailgates, the way people do on a Friday, talking about the hill, and about where to meet in the morning, and whether it was going to rain, which it wasn't, and whose turn it was to bring the cooler.

Ricky walked down the row toward his car at the end by the fence. He had his lunch bag in one hand and the lanyard still around his neck; he'd forgotten to take it off.

Walt's truck was the only one in the row without anything in the box. It was an old Ford, two-tone, brown over tan, with a canopy on it and a Titan Truck Tech sticker on the back window so faded that only the T's were left. Walt was sitting in the driver's seat with the door open and one boot on the running board, eating the other half of something out of wax paper. He nodded at Ricky as he went by. Ricky nodded back. It was the first time either of them had done that.

One of the two Marks was leaning on a tailgate with a can of pop. There was a dirt bike in the box behind him, orange, strapped down at the bars.

"Rook," he said. "You ride?"

Ricky stopped.

This was it. He could feel it. It was Friday, and the week was over, and he had been waiting since Monday morning at twenty past six, for the thing that happens to the new guy. It was going to happen here, in the lot, at the end, with everybody standing around the tailgates in the heat. Somebody was going to ask him something and whatever he said was going to be the wrong answer and everyone was going to laugh, and on Monday it would be a story, and then it would be over and he would be one of them.

"No," he said.

The Mark nodded.

"Okay," he said, and drank some of his pop, and turned back to the other Mark, who was saying something about a carburetor.

Ricky stood there.

Nobody laughed. Nobody said anything else. The other Mark went on about the carburetor. Down the row somebody started their truck, and somebody else shouted something about Harrison, and the moustache went past in a grey Tacoma with the window down and said “See you Monday, Rook,” and then said something to someone else out the other window, and in the something to someone else was his own name, the moustache’s, clearly, first and last, a man calling to a man across a parking lot — and the truck’s engine went up as it said it, and it went past.

Ricky went to his car.

* * *

He sat in it with the door open, letting the heat out.

He took out his phone and opened DON’T GO. The list was where he’d left it. Left-handed wrench. Tin of striped paint. Long weight. Bucket of steam. Sparks filter. And at the bottom, *discs expire*, and under that, a small drawing of a loop and a line and a loop and a tail, which looked, in the sun, even less like anything than it had the day before.

None of it had happened.

He had been waiting all week for it, and none of it had happened, and the week was over. He had parked in the wrong lot, and sat at the wrong table, and forgotten the cheque, and set a bird’s nest in the feed rolls of an old blue welder, and put one tack on a frame for somebody’s truck.

He thought about the question in the lot. *You ride?* He thought about it, the way Walt had thought about the electricians, looking for the trick in it.

It was just a question.

He shut the door, and started the car, and drove out through the gate. Behind him in the lot the pickups were starting up one by one, and pulling out, and heading for the highway, toward Hope, toward Harrison, toward the hill with the name, with their dirt bikes strapped in the boxes at the bars.

T W O

MONDAY

ON MONDAY MORNING the lot was talking about the hill.

Nobody had broken anything. This was the headline, and it was delivered by several people at once, across several tailgates, with a kind of disappointment. One of the Marks had gone up it twice and come down it twice, both times on the bike, and was being made to feel that this was not a story. Dale had not gone at all, because of a thing with his brother-in-law's boat, and was being made to feel that this was worse.

Ricky walked up the row with his lunch. Somebody said "Rook," and somebody else said "Morning, Rook," and one of the Marks, the one who had come down twice, said "You should come next time," and then went straight back to defending himself, so that Ricky never had to answer.

He had the bank letter in his back pocket, folded in three, where it had been all weekend. At seven he went up to the office and knocked on the glass, and the window slid open, and he held the letter out.

A hand took it. "Thank you," said the woman, and the window closed.

He went back out to the floor.

* * *

“Tony,” said the moustache. “This morning. The brake.”

“I’m not allowed on the brake.”

“You’re not on it. You’re next to it.” He pointed with his chin. “He’s got angles for the next frame. You mark, he bends. You hold the long end so it doesn’t whip. Don’t put your fingers anywhere he hasn’t told you to put them.”

“What about the frame?”

The frame from last week was still on the table. It was finished, or looked finished. The moustache had a grinder in one hand and a flap disc on it, and he was going over the welds one at a time, not to take them down, just to take the edge off anything that would catch a glove.

“Frame’s going tomorrow,” he said. “I’ve got it.”

* * *

The press brake was twelve feet long and painted a colour that had once been green. It had a long steel beam across the top that came down, and a long steel block across the bottom that stayed where it was, and between the two, when the beam came down, whatever you had put there was going to become an angle whether it wanted to or not. There was a foot pedal on a cable, and a backgauge behind the die, a set of fingers on a rail that the piece was pushed up against so that every bend landed in the same place.

And there was Tony.

Tony was fifty, maybe, short and square, with reading glasses pushed up on his forehead and a pencil behind each ear. He was counting under his breath, the way he had been counting on Monday of last week, and when Ricky came up he stopped counting and looked at him.

“You’re marking.”

“Yes.”

“Good.” Tony pointed at a cart beside the brake. On it were strips of aluminum sheet, three-sixteenths, sheared to width and a little over twelve feet long, stacked like lumber. “Those need to be cut to blank length. Blank length goes on the cart in pencil before they go to the saw. Drawing’s there.” He pointed at the drawing, which was clipped to the side of the brake with a spring clamp. “Chart’s there.” He pointed at the chart.

The chart was taped to the side of the machine, under a sheet of clear plastic that had once been clear. It was a grid of numbers in pencil, in Tony’s handwriting, with material thicknesses down the side and angles across the top. Some of the numbers had been rubbed out and written in again. In one corner someone had added, in a different pencil, *NOT FOR 6061*, and underlined it twice.

“Deductions,” Tony said. “For this die.”

Ricky knew about deductions. He had spent most of a week on them at BCIT, in a classroom with a whiteboard, on a unit called Bend Allowance and Developed Length, and he had a formula for it that he could still see on the board, with a K-factor in it and an inside radius and a little pi. He had got ninety-four

on the test. He did not say this, but he felt it, the way you feel a twenty in your wallet.

“Okay,” he said.

Tony went back to setting the backgauge. Then he stopped, and turned around, and held up both his hands in front of Ricky’s face, fingers spread, backs toward him, like a man showing a child that there was nothing up his sleeves.

Ricky looked at them. They were thick hands, grey in the creases, with a scar across one knuckle. There were ten fingers.

“Thirty-one years on brakes,” Tony said. “All of them.”

He turned his hands over and showed him the palms, in case, and then put them down.

“When the beam’s moving, your hands are on the end of the piece. Out here.” He showed him where, a long way from the die. “Not in there. Not ever. Not to fix it. Not to hold it square. It doesn’t care that you’re new.”

“Okay.”

“Say it back.”

“Hands on the end. Not in there. Not ever.”

“Not to fix it,” said Tony.

“Not to fix it.”

Tony nodded and turned back to the backgauge and started counting again, from wherever he had left off.

* * *

Ricky did the first one with the formula.

He did it on his phone, on the calculator, standing at the cart with the drawing in front of him. The angle on the drawing

was two inches by two inches outside, three-sixteenths material, ninety degrees. For the inside radius he used the number from the classroom, which was the number you used when you did not know the number, and he got a K-factor from memory, and he worked it through, twice, and wrote the blank length on the end of the first strip in pencil.

He looked at Tony's chart afterward, just to see. Tony's chart had a different number. It was not very different. It was an eighth.

He checked his own number again. He had done it twice. It was right. It was right the way things on a whiteboard were right, where you could see every step, and the chart was just a number, in pencil, rubbed out and written in again, under a sheet of plastic with a thumbprint on it.

He left his number on the strip.

The strip went to the saw. The saw was Sukh's, and Sukh looked at the pencil number on the end of the strip, and at Ricky, and at the number again.

"This Tony's number?"

"It's mine."

Sukh seemed to think about that for exactly as long as it took to set the stop. Then he cut it, and handed it back, and said nothing else, and picked up the next thing on his cart.

It came back at blank length. Tony put it in the brake against the backgauge, and pressed the pedal, and the beam came down, not fast, and the strip folded up along its length with a sound like somebody closing a very heavy book, and Ricky held

the long end the way he had been told, so it didn't whip, and felt it come up in his hands.

Tony took it out of the brake and laid it on the table and put a tape on the first leg. Two inches. He put the tape on the second leg.

He considered it over the tops of his glasses. Then he pulled the glasses down and looked at it again.

"That's long."

"How long?"

"Eighth."

Ricky looked at the chart, and then at his number on the end of the angle, in pencil, which had been bent around the corner along with everything else and was now on two sides of it.

"I did it with the formula," he said.

"What'd you use for radius?"

Ricky told him.

"That's the school die," said Tony. "This isn't the school die." He tapped the brake, the bottom block, with the end of his tape. "This die's older than you. It does what it does. That's what it does." He tapped the chart. "Scrap bin."

"Can't we trim it?"

"Twelve feet of it?" Tony considered this, and considered Ricky, and appeared to decide against a number of things he could have said. "Faster to shear a new one. Scrap bin."

Ricky carried the angle to the scrap bin. It was twelve feet long and the bin was about five, so he laid it across the top,

where it stuck out both ends like a pole across a bathtub. Somebody going past on the way to the saw looked at it, and at him, and said, “Brake?” and Ricky said yes, and they nodded.

When he got back, Tony had already sheared a new strip. It was on the cart. It did not have a number on it.

Ricky looked at the chart and wrote the chart’s number on it.

* * *

The chart’s number was right.

The second angle came off the brake two by two, both legs, and Tony put the tape on it and said nothing, which Ricky was beginning to understand was the good outcome. The third was two by two. By mid-morning Ricky had a rhythm: chart, subtract, pencil, saw, hold, tape. The tape said two. The tape said two.

At some point he realized he had stopped thinking about the formula, and then, because he had realized it, he thought about it. It was still right. It was right about a die that was in a classroom in Burnaby and not here. He put it where he’d put the long table.

Tony counted under his breath as he bent. It took Ricky most of the morning to work out that he was counting angles, and that when he got to a certain number he wrote it on a clipboard hanging off the machine and started again at one.

“How many is that?” Ricky asked, once.

“For the year?” said Tony. He checked the clipboard. He told him. It was a large number, and Tony said it the way you would say the time.

* * *

At ten Tony stopped counting and took his glasses off his forehead and put them in his pocket, and looked around the brake, and looked on top of the brake, and looked on the cart, and then looked at Ricky as though Ricky might be wearing it.

“Square,” he said. “Where’s my square.”

Ricky didn’t have it. Ricky didn’t have a square. He didn’t have a tape either; he had been using the one hanging off the brake on a string.

“Go get the good one,” said Tony. “Fifth table.”

The fifth table was the one with the new MIG machine and the good light, and it was being worked by the older man in the cut-off sleeves. He was bent over a truck body wall with a small hand brake clamped to the end of his table, the kind you worked with a lever, for little parts. He had a short strip of aluminum in it. He did not have a pencil in his hand, or a tape, or a square, and there was no line on the strip that Ricky could see. He pulled the lever. The strip came up and stopped. He took it out and looked at it once.

“Tony wants the square,” Ricky said.

The man didn’t turn around. He reached back without looking, took a square off the end of the table, and held it out behind him, and Ricky took it. Then the man held out the piece

he had just bent, the same way, without turning around, and kept holding it out until Ricky took that too.

It was a little clip, a bent tab of aluminum about the size of a playing card, folded once. Ricky had no idea what it was for. He carried it and the square back to the brake and held out both.

Tony took the square. Then he took the clip and looked at it, and turned it over, and looked at the drawing clipped to the side of the brake, and found something on it in the bottom corner, a little detail in a circle, and held the clip up next to it.

“Oh, good,” said Tony. He put it on the cart with the angles.

“Did you ask him for that?”

“Hm?” Tony was already putting the square to the last angle. “No. I was going to do it after.”

He did not seem to find this interesting. He went back to counting.

Ricky picked up the clip when Tony wasn't looking and put the square on it, because the square was right there. It was ninety. He took the tape off the string and measured the legs, and found the detail on the drawing, and compared them. The legs were what the drawing said, to the line on the tape.

Nobody had marked it. He had watched the strip go into the little brake with nothing on it.

He put the clip back where Tony had put it.

* * *

At noon the horn went, and the foreman went out the back with his coffee cup, and a pickup started in the lot.

At lunch the window table was still talking about the hill. The Mark who had come down it twice had found a way to make it a story, which involved a deer, and the story got better each time someone at the table didn't believe it. Ricky ate his sandwich and listened to the deer get bigger.

"Brake this morning?" the moustache asked him, in a gap.

"Yeah."

"How was Tony?"

Ricky thought about how to answer that. "He counts," he said.

"He counts," the moustache agreed. "Did you do the formula?"

Ricky looked at him.

"Everybody does the formula," said the moustache, and ate a chip. "I did the formula. You get one."

"One what?"

"One angle." The moustache held up one finger. "Then you use the chart."

At the long table, without looking up from his paper, Walt said, "I did two."

"You did two because you did it again to check."

"It was right both times," said Walt, and turned the page.

* * *

In the afternoon Ricky marked and Tony bent, and the stack of angles on the cart got taller, and at some point Ricky's feet began to hurt, which they had not done in the morning, and the backs of his hands were grey where the aluminum had rubbed

off on them, which would not wash off at the sink and would still be faintly there at bedtime.

The foreman came by at twenty to two. Ricky was holding the long end of an angle while Tony bent it, which was the one job all day that could not be mistaken for anything else. The foreman stood at talking distance and watched the beam come down, and the angle come up in Ricky's hands, and Tony take it out and put the tape on it.

"How's it going."

"Good," said Tony.

The foreman looked at the chart on the side of the brake. He seemed to be reading it, which Ricky had not seen him do with anything. Then he looked at the stack on the cart, and at the long angle across the top of the scrap bin, which you could see from here, both ends of it sticking out, and nodded, and went.

Tony put his glasses back on his forehead. "Next," he said.

Later, between angles, Ricky asked about the corner of the chart.

"Why not for 6061?"

Tony didn't answer. He bent down, reached under the brake, into the dark behind the foot pedal, and came up with a short piece of angle that had been lying there long enough to have dust on it. He handed it over.

It was the same size as the ones on the cart. It was a different grey, a little brighter, a little harder-looking. Along the outside of the bend, where the metal had stretched, it had split open in a line of little cracks, all the way along, like the crust on a loaf of bread.

“That’s 6061,” said Tony.

Ricky turned it over.

“Is this yours?”

“Nineteen ninety-seven,” said Tony, and took it back, and put it under the brake where it had been, in the dark behind the pedal, and went on to the next angle.

* * *

At three the moustache came over to the brake and said, “Coupons,” and Ricky went and did coupons.

He did four. The old blue welder behaved. There was no bird’s nest. He tacked both ends and then the middle and then ran the seam, and slowed down at the root the way he had been told, and when the moustache put the first one in the vise and hit it, it bent, and when he put the second one in, it bent, and the third one cracked a little at the end where Ricky had stopped too soon, and the fourth one bent.

“Better,” said the moustache.

He didn’t say anything else about it. He went back to the frame and took a marker out of his pocket and wrote the job number on the end of the rail in capitals.

“Tomorrow,” he said, not really to Ricky. “First thing.”

* * *

When the horn went at half past three, Ricky walked out past the saw. The scrap bin was where it always was. The angle was still across the top of it, both ends sticking out, where he had put it that morning.

The first leg was two inches. The second leg was two and an eighth. The bend was clean and square and the surface wasn't marked. His pencil number was still on the end of it, bent around the corner.

TUESDAY

THE FRAME WENT at ten past seven.

The forklift came down the aisle from receiving with the radio still going somewhere behind it and the man in the backwards cap driving with one hand. He stopped beside the table, lowered the forks, looked at the frame for about as long as it takes to read a licence plate, and slid the forks under it at two points that did not look like the middle. Then he lifted it. It came up level, both ends at once, and did not tip, and did not swing, and hung there over the table as if the table had been a little too low for it all along.

The moustache pulled the traveller off the table and slid it under a strap on the frame. The forklift backed out, beeping, and turned, and went away down the shop toward the assembly bays with the frame across the forks like a ladder, and the man driving it was singing along to something he could not possibly have been hearing from there.

Ricky watched it go around the corner by the brake.

“Where’s it going?”

“Assembly.”

“Then what?”

The moustache thought about it. “Then it’s a truck,” he said.

Ricky looked at the table. It was empty. He had not seen it empty before. It was a big steel table, scarred and spattered, with the outline of the frame still on it in a faint pattern where the grinding dust had settled around the rails and not under them. You could see where everything had been. You could see where the long sill had been, the one from the drop rack. You could see the corner.

“Don’t just stand there,” said the moustache, and put a new drawing down on top of the outline. “Next one.”

* * *

The next one was longer.

It was a frame for a bigger body, eighteen feet, with more crossmembers and a kickup at the front where the frame stepped down over something on the truck, and a set of outriggers on each side that stuck out like the legs of an insect. The drawing was two sheets instead of one. The traveller was already on the table in its plastic sleeve, and in the top corner of the traveller, in a printed box, it said EST. FAB HRS, and in the box, in blue ballpoint, someone had written 4.0.

The moustache looked at the drawing for a while, and then at the traveller. He tapped the box with one finger.

“That’s a six,” he said.

“It says four.”

“It says four,” the moustache agreed.

He left it at that. He folded the second sheet under the first and pinned them to the table with a magnet, and went to get stock.

* * *

Layout was a thing Ricky could do.

He had done it at school and he had done it on Monday at the brake, and it was the same thing at a larger size: you took a long piece of metal that was the same all the way along, and you made marks on it so that it was not. Centre lines. Crossmember locations. The start and end of the pickup. Holes. The moustache showed him where the tape went, which was the end of the rail and not the edge of the table, and how to hook it so it didn't slide, and which marker to use, which was the silver one, because pencil disappeared on aluminum under the lights, and a scribe left a scratch that would still be there in twenty years, which was only a good idea if you wanted it there in twenty years.

"Measure from one end," said the moustache. "Every mark from the same end. Don't measure mark to mark."

"Why?"

"Because if you're out a sixteenth on each one, by the far end you're out a foot."

That was not literally true, Ricky knew, having done the arithmetic before the moustache finished the sentence. But he understood what it meant, and he measured every mark from the same end.

He marked the first long sill. He marked the second. He marked the crossmember locations on both of them, and the moustache came back and put his own tape on them, from the same end, and read each mark, and didn't say anything, and moved on to the next one, and didn't say anything.

Everything measured, and for about forty minutes it was very satisfying.

Then he marked the holes.

There were a lot of them, for the outriggers and the brackets and things Ricky didn't know the names of, and they were dimensioned in a long row along the top of the second sheet, each from the front of the rail. He hooked the tape and marked, and marked, and moved down the rail, and at some point in the middle of the row, without noticing, he hooked the tape on the back of the rail instead, because that was the end he was nearer to, and marked from there.

The moustache came along behind him with his own tape, reading marks. He stopped at one.

"Which end?"

Ricky looked at the mark. He looked at the front of the rail, eighteen feet away, and at the back of the rail, which was right beside him.

"That end," he said, and pointed at the one beside him.

"Every mark from the same end."

Ricky took a rag and a squirt of acetone and wiped the mark off, and walked to the front of the rail, and hooked the tape there, and walked it all the way back, and marked it again, a little over an inch from where it had been.

* * *

Mid-morning, the man from the estimating office came out onto the floor.

He had a clipboard. He was not tall and not short and not anything, and he was wearing a short-sleeved dress shirt with a pen in the pocket, worn as if he had never owned any other kind of shirt. He did not walk the way the foreman walked, behind people. He walked down the middle of the aisle, where he could be seen, slowly, stopping at each table, looking at what was on it, writing something down, and going on.

He stopped at theirs.

He looked at the frame, which was still only two marked longsills and a stack of crossmembers. He looked at the traveller, at the box with 4.0 in it. He looked at the moustache.

“Morning,” he said.

“It’s a six,” said the moustache.

The estimator did not seem surprised by this, or by anything. He read the drawing, both sheets. He looked for a long time at the kickup, and at the outriggers.

“Eighteen-foot frames with a kickup,” he said, “come in at four and a quarter.”

“This one’s a six.”

“Some of them are six,” said the estimator. “Across all of them, it’s four and a quarter.”

He said it the way you would say what day it was. There was no argument in it.

Ricky had been standing to one side holding the tape. He did not usually talk when he was holding the tape. But the estimator was looking at the frame the way nobody else had looked at anything since Ricky got there, like a man reading, and the question was out before he'd decided to ask it.

"How long will this one take?"

The estimator turned.

He looked at him for a moment the way he had looked at Ricky on the first day, from behind his desk, like a new entry in a column. Then he looked back at the frame. Then at the drawing. Then at the frame again.

"Four and a quarter," he said.

"But this one."

The estimator looked at the frame. He looked at it for a long time, longer than he had looked at anything else, and Ricky, who had asked, stood there holding the tape and waited, because it seemed that the man was actually trying.

"Four and a quarter," the estimator said again, in exactly the same way, as if it were the only number he had and he was giving Ricky all of it.

He wrote something on his clipboard.

"There's an apprentice on this table," he said, still writing.

"That's me."

"An apprentice on a table adds forty minutes." He looked up. "On average."

"Is that me? The forty minutes?"

The estimator looked at him again, and there was something in his face, briefly, that might have been interest, or might have

been the face of a man who has been handed a single grain of sand and asked which beach it is from.

"It's apprentices," he said.

He tucked the pen back in his pocket and went on to the next table, where he looked at Dale's job and wrote something down and did not stop long.

The moustache watched him go.

"He's never wrong," the moustache said.

"It's a six, though."

"He's never wrong," said the moustache, and picked up a crossmember, "and it's a six."

At the next table Dale had stopped work to listen, and he came over now, pulling off a glove.

"He give you the four and a quarter?"

"Yeah."

Dale nodded, slowly, like a man hearing that a friend had been in the same accident. "He gave me three and a half on a subframe. My first year." He looked down the aisle to where the estimator was writing something at the brake. "So I did it in three and a half. To show him."

"And?"

"Three and a half," said Dale. "On the nose." He put his glove back on. "Never been so angry in my life."

He went back to his table.

* * *

By late morning the crossmembers were in.

That was not quite true. They were tacked in. The moustache fit them and Ricky held them and the moustache tacked them, and when they were all in the moustache stood back and put a tape corner to corner, one diagonal and then the other, and the diagonals were the same, which meant the frame was square, which he said was the only thing that mattered at this stage and the rest was just welding.

Then he looked at the kickup.

The kickup was on the second sheet of the drawing, a sort of box made of four pieces of channel at angles that were not ninety degrees, and the drawing had the angles on it, and the lengths, and the moustache looked at it for a while and said a word Ricky had not heard him say before.

“What?”

“Nothing.” The moustache folded the drawing so that only the kickup showed. “It’s fine. It’s just the part where the four goes.”

* * *

At noon the horn went. The foreman went out the back with his cup. Ricky saw the pickup go, out of the corner of his eye, and did not think about it.

At the window table Dale was saying that the Chilliwack order had come in.

“Rescue body,” Dale said. “Big one. They want it before the snow.”

“It’s August,” said one of the Marks.

“They said before the snow.”

“Who’s on it?”

Dale shrugged. “Whoever he puts on it.”

Everyone at the table seemed to know who *he* was, and nobody looked toward the back door, and after a moment the conversation went on to something else, which was whether the Mark who had come down the hill twice had really seen a deer or had seen a large dog, and whether it mattered, and it was agreed at some length that it did.

Ricky ate his sandwich. He thought about four and a quarter.

“How long do frames take you?” he asked the moustache, in a gap. “Normally.”

“Depends on the frame.”

“But normally.”

The moustache looked at him and, for the first time since Ricky had met him, appeared to think about something for a long time.

“Depends on the frame,” he said.

Ricky finished his sandwich and went over to the long table and stood at the correct distance. Walt looked up from the paper.

“The estimator,” Ricky said. “Is he ever wrong?”

“About what?”

“How long things take.”

“How long what takes?”

“A frame.”

Walt considered this. He folded the paper once, along a line it had already been folded along.

“About frames?” he said. “No.”

“About this frame?”

“Is it done?”

“No.”

“Then he’s not wrong yet,” said Walt, and unfolded the paper.

* * *

The pickup took the afternoon.

It took most of it. Each piece of channel had to be cut at an angle on the saw, and Ricky carried the cut list to Sukh, who read it with his glasses on.

“Twenty-two and a half,” Sukh said.

“It says twenty-two and a half.”

“It always says twenty-two and a half.” He set the saw. “Kick-ups.” He said it the way the estimator would say it later, as a category, and cut them.

The angles on the drawing were right, and Sukh cut them right, and they went together wrong anyway, because each one was right by itself and all four were a hair off in the same direction. The moustache fit them and took them apart and fit them again, and trimmed one, and fit them again. Ricky held pieces. He held them at angles he had not known his arms went to. He handed clamps in an order that he began to understand, a little, from inside it, the way you understand a song after you’ve heard it a few times without meaning to.

At two the moustache said, “Hold that,” and Ricky held that, and the moustache tacked it, and it held.

At ten past two Ricky held the next piece, and the moustache tacked it, and it held, and then the moustache stood back to look at it and was quiet for a second.

“Other way,” he said.

Ricky looked at the piece. It was a length of channel cut at twenty-two and a half on one end and a different angle on the other, and he had held it in exactly the right place, with its ends swapped. It fit. It fit perfectly, the wrong way round, which the moustache said was the thing about channel.

The moustache ground the tacks out. It did not take long. He turned the piece end for end, and Ricky held it, and he tacked it again.

“That’s four minutes,” the moustache said, and went on.

Ricky held the next piece, and before the moustache tacked it, he looked at both ends.

At quarter to three the kickup was a box.

The moustache stood back and looked at it, and put a square on it, and a tape across it, and made a sound through his nose.

“Now it’s just welding,” he said.

He looked at the clock over the brake.

There was a pile of offcuts at the end of the table from the kickup, short ends of channel cut at twenty-two and a half, and odd triangles. Ricky picked up the broom.

“Not those,” said the moustache. “Those are coupons.”

“They’re not flat.”

“Channel’s got a flat side.” The moustache picked up one of the triangles and turned it over and showed him: the web of the channel, flat, bright where the saw had been. “Cut them

square on the saw tomorrow. Nothing goes in the bin till it's been a coupon."

Ricky put the broom back. He stacked the offcuts on the shelf under the table, beside the flashlight, where they would be in the morning.

* * *

The estimator came back at twenty past three.

He came down the aisle at the same speed, stopping at the same tables, and he stopped at theirs. The frame was on the table with its crossmembers in and its kickup boxed and its outriggers stacked beside it, unfitted. There were no finished welds on any of it. There was, from the outside, a long way to go.

The estimator looked at the frame. He glanced up at the clock over the brake. He wrote something down.

"Tomorrow morning," said the moustache.

The estimator nodded as though he had been told the temperature.

"Six," said the moustache. "Maybe six and a half. The kickup."

"Kickups," said the estimator, and wrote that down too.

Ricky, who was holding the broom, which was the only thing left to hold, said, "Does this one change it? The four and a quarter?"

The estimator stopped writing and considered the question. It seemed to be the kind of question he liked. He looked down

his clipboard, at a column of something, and then up at the frame, and back.

“By a minute,” he said. “A bit less.”

He tucked the pen in his pocket and went on. At the next table he stopped at Dale’s job, which was finished, and wrote something down and looked satisfied, or at least looked the same, and went on toward the office end.

* * *

When the horn went Ricky walked out the long way, past the assembly bays, because he had not been down there yet and wanted to see.

The assembly bays were at the shipping end of the shop, bigger than the fab bays, with higher ceilings and a gantry crane on a track overhead. There were bodies in them at different stages: one with its walls up and no roof, one with a roof and no doors, one that was nearly done and had a man lying on his back underneath it with a flashlight in his teeth.

In the last bay there was a frame on stands, and on the frame there was a floor.

It was just a floor. It was a sheet of aluminum treadplate, the kind with the raised diamonds on it, laid over the frame and clamped at the edges, and tacked in a few places, and it covered the frame from end to end. You could see the frame underneath from the side, the rails and the ends of the crossmembers sticking out, and a traveller in a plastic sleeve under a strap on one rail. From above you could not see anything but the floor.

Ricky stood and looked at it for a minute. Then a man he did not know walked past with a sheet of aluminum on a cart and said “Rook,” not unkindly, meaning *you’re in the way*, and Ricky got out of the way and went out through the shipping door and around the side of the building to the back lot.

In the car he sat with the engine off and tried to work out whether he was the forty minutes.

He thought about the frame and the pickup, and how long he had held things, and the estimator looking at him like a single grain of sand.

He couldn’t tell. There was only one of him.

He opened DON’T GO and typed *forty minutes* at the bottom, under the signature, and looked at it, and deleted it.

WEDNESDAY

RICKY GOT IN at twenty to seven, because he had woken at five and lain there until it was stupid.

The lot was nearly empty. The roll-up door at receiving was open a foot at the bottom, and he ducked under it, and inside the shop was mostly dark. Somebody had turned on the lights over the brake and over the aisle and nowhere else, and the tables stood in rows in the half-light with their jobs on them, curtains drawn back, machines off, the way a classroom looks before anybody's in it.

The foreman was at the whiteboard.

It was a big whiteboard on wheels by the brake, and it had a grid on it made of black electrical tape, with table numbers down one side and job numbers in the squares, in marker, in several colours. The foreman was standing in front of it with a coffee in one hand and a marker in the other, not writing, just looking at it, the way the estimator had looked at the frame. He had his back to the aisle. He did not turn around.

"Morning," said the foreman.

Ricky had not said anything. He had not, as far as he knew, made a sound. He had ducked under a door and walked thirty feet on a concrete floor in new boots.

“Morning,” said Ricky.

The foreman uncapped the marker and wrote something in one square, and wiped something out of another with the side of his hand, and looked at the board a while longer. Then he capped the marker and went down the aisle toward the office end, and at each table he passed, he glanced at what was on it, not stopping, the way you’d glance at the gauges on a dashboard.

Ricky went and looked at the board.

He found table twelve, which was the moustache’s. Next to it was the job number of the pickup frame, and next to that, in the next square, a job number he didn’t know, and next to that, in a different colour, just a question mark. He looked at all the other tables. They all had job numbers. Some had question marks.

He looked for himself on the board. He wasn’t sure what he expected, an initial, a little R. There was nothing. He wasn’t a table. He was on table twelve.

He stood there reading the board in the half-light until the lights came on over the rest of the shop, row by row, starting at the office end, and people began to come in.

* * *

“You’re running crossmembers,” said the moustache at seven.

He said it while taking his lunch out of his bag, not looking up, in the same voice he used for *hand me the long one*. Ricky heard it and did not immediately understand it, and then did.

“On the frame?”

“On the frame.”

The frame was where they had left it, eighteen feet of it, tacked together, with the kickup boxed at the front and the outriggers stacked beside it. It had been sitting there all night. In the morning light it looked finished, which the moustache said was the most dangerous way for a frame to look, because it was only tacks.

“Stitch welds,” said the moustache. He took the silver marker and made little lines on the corner where the first crossmember met the long sill. Two inches, a gap, two inches, a gap. “Two on, skip, two on. Both sides. Stagger them. You run it solid, you’ll pull it —” He stopped, and looked for the word. “Banana. You’ll pull it banana. Heat goes in, it moves.”

“Two on, skip.”

“You want to see banana?” The moustache didn’t wait for an answer. He walked to the end of the fab bay, to a corner where long pieces leaned against the wall that were too long for the scrap bin and not wanted by anybody, and came back with a length of rectangular tube about eight feet long, and laid it on the table.

It lay on its side. Then he rolled it over, and it lay on its back, and the two ends of it lifted off the table, just a little, the middle of it touching and the ends not, like a canoe.

“Somebody ran that solid,” said the moustache. “One side. One pass. Nice weld, too.” He ran his thumb along it; there was a bead down one corner, grey and even and very good. “Pulled it an inch and a half.”

“Who?”

The moustache looked at him and did not answer, and rolled the tube back onto its side, where it lay nearly flat and looked nearly fine, and carried it back to the corner.

“And the first inch.” The moustache put his gloved hand flat on the rail. “This is cold. Everything in here’s cold, it’s been sitting all night. Aluminum pulls the heat out of the puddle and takes it down the rail. First inch of every weld is the coldest inch you’ll do all day. Let it wet in before you go.”

“Let it wet in.”

“You’ll see it. Puddle goes shiny, edges go flat. Then go.”

He watched Ricky set the machine. He changed one number on it. He watched Ricky brush the joint, and wipe it, and brush it again, and put his helmet down, and then he said, “Go on,” and Ricky went on.

* * *

It was not like coupons.

The difference was that a coupon lay on the table and waited for you, and the frame did not. The frame was big and cold and very still and it took the heat out of the puddle so fast that for the first second Ricky thought the machine had turned itself down. The puddle sat at the end of the wire, dull, small, not doing anything. He held it there. He held it there longer

than he wanted to, longer than he thought he'd be allowed to, with the arc frying and the helmet going green-dark all around it, until the puddle went shiny all at once, like somebody had flicked a switch, and the edges flattened into the corner.

Then he went.

Two inches. He stopped. He flipped the helmet up. There was a stitch in the corner of the joint, two inches long, grey, rippled, and the edges of it went down into both pieces, flat, the way the moustache's did.

The moustache leaned in and looked at it, and said nothing.

"Skip," he said. "Next one."

Ricky did the next one. He did the one after that, on the other side, staggered. He did four stitches on the first crossmember and the moustache watched every one and said nothing each time, and then, on the fifth, said "Good," which was so much more than nothing that Ricky flipped the helmet up to see if something was wrong.

"Keep going," said the moustache, and went to the other end of the frame to start on the outriggers.

* * *

The foreman came by while Ricky was on the second crossmember.

Ricky didn't know this. He had his helmet down. He was in the green world, where the only things were the wire and the puddle and the corner, and outside the green world there could have been anything. He ran a stitch, and skipped, and

ran another, and flipped the helmet up to look, and there was nobody there.

“Foreman was by,” the moustache said, from the far end.

“When?”

“Just now.”

Ricky looked up the aisle and down it. He didn’t see him.

“What’d he say?”

“Nothing,” said the moustache. “He watched you run one.”

Ricky looked at the stitch he had just run. It was fine. It was good. It was one of the better ones. He had no idea which one the foreman had watched.

He put the helmet down and ran the next one, and then, when he stopped, instead of looking at the weld, he flipped the helmet up and looked straight behind him.

Nobody.

He turned back to the weld. It was fine.

* * *

He tried it twice more over the morning.

It was stupid and he knew it was stupid, but he could not stop. He would run a stitch, a good one, a careful one, and the second the arc went out he would flip the helmet and turn, fast. There was never anybody. There was the aisle, and Dale’s back at the next table, and the brake coming down and Tony counting beside it, and once, far off, the estimator walking down the middle of the shop with his clipboard.

Around ten he ran out of wire at the tip. He had to stop, and cut the wire back, and change the contact tip, which he had

watched the moustache do and had never done himself, and he was not fast at it. He stood at the machine with the old tip in his teeth and the new tip in his glove and the cutters in his other hand, doing nothing that could be mistaken for welding.

"Morning," said the foreman, behind him.

Ricky took the tip out of his teeth.

"Morning."

The foreman looked at the machine. He looked at the frame, from the kickup to the back end, along the rail where the stitches were, grey, one after another, two on, skip, two on. Then he looked at Ricky's hands, the cutters and the tip, and went on down the aisle toward paint.

"He was by again," said the moustache, a minute later.

"I saw him," said Ricky. "That time I saw him."

"Not that time," said the moustache. "Before that. When you were running the second crossmember."

Ricky looked at the crossmember, and at the last stitch. It was one of the best ones he'd done.

"He didn't say anything?"

"He never says anything."

* * *

At noon the foreman went out the back.

Ricky saw him go, this time. He happened to be facing that way, with his helmet up, looking at the frame. The foreman went through the roll-up door at receiving with his cup, the same way as every day, the same speed, and the pickup started

in the lot and went out the gate. Nobody looked up. Ricky looked at the clock over the brake. It said twelve.

In the lunchroom, the window table was quiet for once, eating. Ricky sat down next to the moustache, who moved his chips over.

“Ran crossmembers this morning,” Ricky said, to the table in general.

Across the table one of the Marks looked up. “On what?”

“The eighteen-footer. With the kickoff.”

The Mark nodded slowly, chewing.

“Good,” he said, and went back to his sandwich.

That was all. Nobody else said anything. Ricky had not known what he expected, and it was not that.

A man came in partway through lunch whom Ricky had never seen before. He was wearing a delivery company’s shirt and carrying a clipboard, and he said “Anybody got a pen?” to the room, and somebody gave him one, and he signed something against the wall, and then, on his way out, he stopped at the counter and poured himself a cup of coffee.

From the coffee maker on the right.

The lunchroom went quiet. It was not a dramatic quiet. Nobody put anything down. It was just that the talking at both tables stopped at the same moment, the way a room goes quiet when somebody has dropped a glass, and everybody waited.

The delivery man drank some of the coffee. He made a face that was the face of a man drinking coffee from a lunchroom, no more. He said “Thanks,” to the room, and put the cup in the sink, and went out.

The talking started again at both tables at once.

Ricky looked at the moustache. The moustache was eating a chip. Ricky looked at the coffee maker on the right, which had a pot on it that was now a cup less full, and which was sitting there on its warmer exactly as before.

Nobody said anything about it.

"What's wrong with it?" Ricky said to the moustache, quietly.
"The one on the right."

"Nothing."

"Then why doesn't anybody —"

"Nothing's wrong with it," said the moustache, and ate a chip, and that was all he said about it, then or later.

* * *

The foreman came back at one.

Ricky was already at the frame. He had been at the frame since twenty to one, because there was nowhere else he wanted to be, and he had his gloves on and his helmet on his head, flipped up, and he was looking at the next crossmember.

He put his hand on the rail. It was cool. It was cool the way it had been first thing in the morning, before he'd put any heat in it; the frame had sat for most of an hour, and the heat he'd put into it had gone wherever heat went. He thought about the first inch. He thought about how the stitches had gone just before lunch, when the rail was warm under his glove and the puddle came up shiny almost as soon as he struck the arc, and how he'd got quick by the end of the morning, not rushing, just quick, the way you get quick at anything.

“Afternoon,” said the foreman, behind him.

“Afternoon.”

The foreman stood there. He did not go. He stood at talking distance with his coffee, behind Ricky’s left shoulder, and Ricky could feel him there the way you can feel somebody reading over your shoulder on a bus.

Ricky put his helmet down.

He struck the arc. The puddle came up. It came up dull and then it came up a little brighter, and Ricky, with the foreman behind him, with the foreman actually standing there watching him weld for once, went. Two inches. It went easily. It went more easily than the ones before lunch. He stopped, and skipped, and did the next one, and it went easily too, and he flipped the helmet up.

Two grey stitches in the corner, rippled, the right length, the right width. They looked like the ones from the morning. They looked like the moustache’s.

He turned around.

The foreman was already walking away, toward shipping. He did not look back.

* * *

The afternoon went.

Ricky ran the rest of the crossmembers, and the moustache finished the outriggers, and then they swapped, and the moustache ran the kickup where the angles were bad and the heat went strange, and Ricky held the flashlight and watched how

the moustache moved the gun around the corners, a little sideways, a little slower, as if he were talking the puddle into going where he wanted. He never stopped to think about it. He'd tip the gun a few degrees and speed up or slow down the way you'd lean on a bicycle going round a bend, without ever deciding to. Ricky watched him do it for most of an hour and tried to see the decision, and couldn't. At some point Ricky stopped turning around after every weld. He did not decide to stop. He just noticed, at around half past two, that he had not done it in a while.

At three the moustache walked the length of the frame, slowly, with a flashlight, looking at every weld. He did it the way the estimator walked the aisle: from the kickup to the back end, stopping, looking, going on. Ricky walked beside him, a half step back, and looked at them too. They all looked the same. Two on, skip, two on, grey and even, all the way down.

"Tomorrow I'll go over it again with fresh eyes," said the moustache. "Then it goes."

"Does it need to?"

"Always," said the moustache.

* * *

The foreman came by at ten past three.

He did not come to the side of the table this time. He came to the end of it, the back end, and stood there with his coffee, and looked down the length of the frame toward the kickup. The frame was eighteen feet of rail and crossmember, stitched grey at every joint, the light from overhead lying along it.

He looked for a while.

Ricky, who was sweeping, stopped sweeping. The foreman's eyes went down the frame, slowly, and at some point in the middle they stopped, somewhere around the crossmembers, and stayed stopped for a moment. Ricky could not tell where. He tried to follow the line of the foreman's look and it went down the rail and into the middle of the frame and he could not tell which joint, or whether it was a joint, or whether the man was just thinking about something else with his eyes open.

Then the foreman looked up.

"Afternoon," he said, to both of them.

"Afternoon," said the moustache.

The foreman went.

* * *

When the horn went, Ricky hung his helmet on the hook under the table and his gloves on the helmet, and looked at the frame one more time. He could not have said why. It was not his frame.

"You were by the whiteboard this morning," the moustache said, pulling his bag out from under the table.

Ricky looked at him. "How do you know?"

"You weren't at the table when I came in. You were reading the board."

"I was looking for me."

The moustache laughed. It was the first time Ricky had heard him laugh, a short sound, surprised out of him, like a cough.

"You're not on the board," he said. "You're on me."

He slung his bag over his shoulder and went out the back.

THURSDAY

THE MOUSTACHE WENT over the frame with fresh eyes at five past seven.

He did it with a flashlight, even though the lights were on, holding it low and to the side so the beam went along each weld instead of straight at it. He started at the kickup and went slowly down the near side, stitch by stitch, and Ricky walked a half step behind him with his coffee going cold in his hand and looked where the flashlight looked.

The kickup was fine. The outriggers were fine. The stitches on the first crossmember, the morning ones, were fine, and the moustache's light slid over them and went on. The second crossmember was fine.

On the third crossmember the light stopped.

It stayed on one stitch. Then it went away and came back to the same stitch from a different angle, lower, almost flat along the rail, and stayed there.

"Come here," said the moustache.

Ricky came there.

“Look at the start,” said the moustache. “Not the middle. The start. Get down.”

Ricky got down, so that his eye was level with the rail, and looked along the stitch in the flashlight. It was grey and rippled and two inches long. It was the right width. From above it had looked like all the others, and from above it still did.

From the side, at the start, it didn't.

At the start of the stitch, for the first half inch or so, the edges of the weld did not go down into the metal. They sat on it. There was a line, very fine, where the grey of the weld met the grey of the rail, and the line was a little shadow, a little ledge, the way a bead of caulk sits on a tile when you haven't pressed it in. Further along, the edges went flat and wet into the corner, like the rest. But at the start, the weld was lying on the rail the way the caterpillar bead had lain on the scrap, the first day.

“That's cold,” said the moustache.

Ricky looked at it for a long time.

“It looks the same from up there.”

“Yeah.”

The moustache straightened up and turned the flashlight off and put it in his back pocket. He did not seem angry. He did not seem anything. He looked at Ricky in the way he looked at a joint before he decided how to fit it.

“A cold weld,” he said, “is a failure waiting to happen at the worst possible time.”

He said it once, plainly, as if reading it off something. Then he went and got the grinder.

* * *

He ground it out himself.

He did it with a carbide burr on a die grinder, not the angle grinder, because the angle grinder would have taken too much of the rail with it. He took the stitch down to nothing in about a minute, and then a little past nothing, into a shallow groove, clean and bright. Then he brushed it with the blue-tape brush and wiped it, and handed Ricky the gun.

"Let it wet in," he said.

Ricky put his hand on the rail. It was cool, the way it had been at one o'clock yesterday, with the foreman standing behind him.

He put his helmet down and struck the arc and held it.

He held it there, dull, small, while the rail took the heat away, longer than was comfortable, longer than he thought anyone standing behind him would have liked, until it went shiny all at once, and the edges flattened. Then he went.

He flipped up the helmet. The moustache got down with the flashlight and looked along it from the side.

"That's a weld," he said, and stood up.

Ricky stood there with the gun in his hand.

"Did the foreman see it?" he said. "Yesterday. The cold one."

The moustache considered this.

"Did he say anything?"

"No."

"Then I don't know," said the moustache, and went on down the frame with the flashlight to finish the far side.

* * *

The frame went before ten, on the forks, level, to assembly, with the traveller under a strap and the moustache's loop and line and tail on it, and a blank line below that for the next station. The forklift man sang. The table was left with an eighteen-foot outline on it in grinding dust.

Ricky looked at it until the moustache put down the next drawing.

* * *

The next drawing was not a frame.

"Tomorrow," said the moustache, "you're in assembly. Half a day. They need a helper."

He unfolded it. It was a drawing of the inside of a body, the curbside compartments, in the views drawings came in: from the front, from the side, cut open along a line marked with arrows. There were shelves drawn in, and a hose reel, and on the inside of one compartment wall, a bracket, drawn small, with four little crosses where its holes went.

"Bracket goes here," the moustache said. "You're drilling the holes. Four of them. They'll show you. You mark, you drill, they hang it."

"Where do the holes go?"

"On the drawing."

Ricky looked at the drawing. He found the bracket. He found the four little crosses. He found a note beside them, in the small capitals drawings used, that said *4X Ø 9/32 THRU — LOCATE*

PER VENDOR DWG, and a part number, and then nothing. There was no dimension from the crosses to anything. There was no line going from the crosses to the edge of the wall, or to the floor, or to the door opening. There was just the bracket, floating on the wall, with its four crosses, per vendor drawing.

"It doesn't say where," Ricky said.

The moustache looked. He found the note. He read it twice, and then looked at the rest of the sheet.

"Go ask Design," he said.

* * *

Design was the last door on the left in the office hallway, and it was open, and the room inside was very quiet in the way that rooms with a lot of paper in them are quiet.

There were four of the grey desks, each with two monitors. There were flat files against the back wall, wide shallow drawers in grey steel, each drawer with a label in a plastic holder. There was a plotter in the corner, the size of a small piano, with a roll of paper in it. There were two people at two of the desks who looked up when he came in and then looked at the far desk, where the man in the cardigan was.

One of them was on the phone. She had it tucked into her shoulder and was writing on a pad while she listened, and what she was writing, as far as Ricky could see, was a column of shades of white. "Is that the white off the old truck," she was saying, "or the white off the brochure? Because those are different whites." She listened. She crossed one out. "No, I understand. I'm asking which white."

The man in the cardigan was comparing two drawings on his two screens. He had been comparing drawings on Monday of last week, and on Friday of last week at ten past seven, and Ricky had the impression that he had not stopped.

“Excuse me,” said Ricky.

The man in the cardigan looked up. “Good morning.”

“I have a question about a callout.”

The man in the cardigan did not say *what callout* or *which job*. He held out his hand, and Ricky put the drawing in it, and he laid it flat on the desk and put a finger on the bracket without looking for it, as if the bracket had been the only thing on the page.

“Locate per vendor drawing,” he said.

“Yeah. It doesn’t say where.”

“It says where,” said the man in the cardigan, gently. He moved his finger. Over on the far side of the sheet, in the cut-open view, the one Ricky had looked at and not understood, there was a dimension running from the floor of the compartment to the bottom of the bracket, and another from the door opening to the edge of it. They were small. They were there.

Ricky looked at them for a moment. He felt his face go hot.

“Section B-B,” said the man in the cardigan. “It’s easy to miss. It’s on the wrong side of the page. It was on the right side of the page in Revision A.” He turned to one of his monitors, and a drawing came up on it that was the same drawing with a different letter in the corner. “The bracket moved in Revision B, and the section moved with it, and the dimensions moved with

the section. They should have stayed with the bracket. That's my fault. It'll be fixed in C."

"Okay," said Ricky. "Thanks. I just needed where."

He was halfway to picking the drawing back up when he asked the next question, and he didn't know why he asked it, except that the man in the cardigan was looking at him as if he were about to ask something.

"Why there, though?"

The man in the cardigan did not smile, but something in the room changed, the way it does when you ask a man about the thing he has been waiting all week for somebody to ask about.

* * *

"The bracket is a hose-reel mounting bracket," said the man in the cardigan, "from a vendor in Ohio." He pulled open a drawer of the flat file without getting up, by reaching behind him, and brought out a sheet, and laid it on top of the drawing. It was a catalogue page, photocopied, with a drawing of the bracket and a table of dimensions. "The hole pattern comes from here. Page fourteen of their catalogue, the current one. They changed the pattern two catalogues ago; the old pattern is on page twelve of that one, if you ever need it." He tapped the table. "Nine-thirty-seconds through, four places, on these centres."

"Okay."

"The height comes from the customer." Another drawer, another sheet: a letter, on a municipal letterhead, with a signature and a date from a few years ago. "They want the hose reel at a

height where a person of average height can reach the crank without a step. They give the height here.” He put his finger on a sentence. “The average height they’re using is from a table in a standard, which I have.” Another drawer. “Which is a little out of date. The newer table is a quarter-inch taller. I used theirs, because it’s theirs.”

“Okay.”

“The distance from the door opening comes from the last body we built them.” He turned to the other monitor, and a drawing came up with a job number Ricky didn’t recognise, from years ago, and a bracket on a wall in the same place. “Which came from the body they had before ours, which was built by somebody else. They measured it for us. They sent the measurement in the letter.” He tapped the letter again, a different sentence. “They measured to the centre of the old bracket. I assumed. I have written that I assumed.”

He turned the catalogue page over. On the back, in pencil, in handwriting so small and even that it looked like it had been typed very slowly, were notes. A column of them. Each one was a number and where the number came from: *catalogue p.14, cust. ltr, std. table (old), prev. job, cust. meas. of prev. unit — assumed ctr.*, and at the bottom, underlined once, *bracket not seen.*

Ricky read the last one twice.

“You haven’t seen the bracket?”

“No,” said the man in the cardigan. “It comes in tomorrow. Receiving.” He took the catalogue page off the drawing and held it out. “Take this. Give it to whoever’s hanging it.”

Ricky took it.

“So will it fit?”

The man in the cardigan considered the question.

“I know where every number came from,” he said. “I haven’t seen the bracket.”

He turned back to his two monitors, one revision on each, and began comparing them again.

Ricky was at the door when the plotter in the corner woke up.

It made a sound like a long intake of breath and began to move, the carriage running back and forth across the roll of paper, and a drawing came down out of the front of it an inch at a time. Ricky stopped in the doorway to watch it, because he had never watched one, and because it was the kind of thing you stopped for. It was the inside of a body, curbside compartments, the views drawings came in. It was the drawing in his hand.

In the section view, the one on the far side of the page, the dimensions to the bracket had moved. They were on the right side of the page now, next to the bracket.

In the corner, in the box, the revision letter came down last. It was a C.

The man in the cardigan did not look round at it.

* * *

At lunch he told the window table, because it seemed like the kind of thing you told, that he had gone to Design to ask where a bracket went.

“And?” said Dale.

“It was on the drawing. On the far side.”

The table received this without comment. One of the Marks nodded.

“He give you the talk?” said the moustache.

“What talk?”

The moustache looked at him. Ricky took the catalogue page out of his back pocket and unfolded it and turned it over, so the pencil notes showed, the column of them, *bracket not seen at* the bottom.

“Yeah,” said the moustache. “That’s the talk.”

At the long table, Walt said, without looking up, “Ohio.”

“How did you know it was Ohio?”

“It’s always Ohio,” said Walt, and turned the page.

* * *

In the afternoon the moustache took him down to assembly to see the body.

It was in the third bay, the one with the gantry crane over it. It was a service body, not painted yet, just bare aluminum with the protective film still on some of the panels, with its compartments in and its doors off, stacked on a cart beside it with their hinges wrapped in tape. A man was inside one of the compartments on his knees with a caulking gun. He looked up.

“Tomorrow,” said the moustache. “The brackets. This is who’s drilling them.”

The man with the caulking gun looked at Ricky, and looked at the moustache, and nodded.

“Rook,” he said, as if confirming a delivery, and went back to caulking.

The moustache showed Ricky the compartment. It was on the curbside, near the front, a tall one with a smooth inside wall, bare aluminum, clean, the film peeled off the inside. This was where the bracket went. Ricky looked at the wall and tried to see the bracket on it, per vendor drawing, at the height a person of average height could reach, per the customer, per the old table, at the distance from the door opening that somebody had measured on a body built by somebody else, to the centre, assumed.

The wall was flat and grey and didn’t say anything.

“They’ll have the bracket by then,” said the moustache. “Mark off the drawing. Check it against the bracket. Then drill.”

“Okay.”

“Go get a drill from Harjit. Tell him it’s for assembly.”

* * *

Harjit was at his window with an orange. He signed out a cordless drill with two batteries, and a small plastic case of bits, and wrote Ricky’s name on his clipboard without asking how to spell it.

“Bring it back,” said Harjit.

“Tomorrow.”

“Bring it back tomorrow,” Harjit agreed, and went back to his orange.

* * *

He spent the last hour on coupons.

He cut the kickup offcuts square on the saw, under Sukh's eye, the way the moustache had said, and brushed them and wiped them and laid them in pairs on the table, and stitched them: two on, skip, two on, letting the first inch wet in every time, even though a coupon did not pull the heat away the way a frame did, because the moustache was watching and because he wanted to.

The moustache put them in the vise one at a time and hit them.

They bent. The first one bent. The second. He did six, and all six bent at the seam and did not break, and the moustache looked at the last one for a moment, bent in the vise like a dog-eared page, and then took it out and dropped it in the scrap bin with the others and said nothing at all.

Ricky waited for him to say something.

"What," said the moustache.

"Nothing," said Ricky.

He swept up.

* * *

When the horn went Ricky put the drill in its case under the table, with the batteries and the case of bits, and took the drawing with him, folded, with the catalogue page inside it.

He sat in the car and took the catalogue page back out and read the pencil column again, from the top.

catalogue p.14.

cust. ltr.

std. table (old).

prev. job.

cust. meas. of prev. unit — assumed ctr.

bracket not seen.

FRIDAY

THE MAN WITH the caulking gun was called Len, and he was waiting in the third bay at seven with two coffees, one of which turned out to be for Ricky.

“Rook,” he said, and held it out.

Ricky took it. He looked at it. It was coffee. He had not been handed a coffee by anyone since he’d started, and his first thought, before he could stop it, was the list. He drank some. It was fine. It was from the left.

“Moustache says you’re mine till lunch,” said Len. He didn’t say moustache. He said the name, and it went past, the way it always went past, and Ricky let it. “Brackets, then whatever. You got a drill?”

Ricky had a drill. He had the drill from Harjit, and the two batteries, and the plastic case of bits, and the drawing with the catalogue page folded inside it, and he laid them all out on the cart beside the body in a row, the way the moustache laid out clamps.

Len looked at the row and seemed to approve of it. He unclipped his own tape and added it to the end.

“Bracket’s coming up,” he said. “Harjit’s got it.”

* * *

The body stood in the bay the way it had stood the day before, bare, with its compartment doors on a cart beside it in tape. In the morning light from the high windows it looked bigger. It was somebody’s. There was a sheet taped to the front with a customer name on it, a municipality somewhere up the valley, and a date, and a list of stations, and more than half of them had initials beside them already.

The compartment was the tall one on the curbside near the front. Ricky climbed up into it. It was the size of a small closet, aluminum on every side, smelling of the caulk Len had been running the day before along every seam. The inside wall was smooth and grey. On the other side of it, an inch or so away, was the outside of the truck: the curbside skin, the big flat panel that ran the length of the body, that the customer’s name would go on, in vinyl, in a few weeks, in letters two feet high.

Ricky did not think about that. He thought about Section B-B.

He found the dimensions on the far side of the page, where they had been all along. He hooked Len’s tape on the floor of the compartment and measured up, and made a mark with the silver marker. He hooked it on the edge of the door opening and measured across, and made a mark. Where the two marks met, he made a cross. That was the bottom corner of the bracket. From there the hole pattern went on the catalogue page, page fourteen, current, and he laid out the four holes one by one

from the same corner, not mark to mark, and when he was done there were four small silver crosses on the grey wall, in a rectangle, and he measured the diagonals of the rectangle, both ways, and they were the same.

He sat back on his heels in the compartment and looked at them. They looked like they had been there all along.

* * *

Harjit came up with the bracket at a quarter to eight.

It was in a plastic bag inside a box, with a packing slip that said Ohio on it. Harjit put it on the cart beside the drill and said, "That the drill?" and Ricky said yes, and Harjit said, "Bring it back," and went.

Ricky took the bracket out of the bag. It was a heavy bent-steel thing, powder-coated black, shaped like a shelf with a lip, with four slotted holes in the back plate. He had not seen it before. Nobody here had. He took it up into the compartment and held it against the wall, with its bottom corner on his silver cross, and looked through the four slots at the wall behind.

Four silver crosses looked back at him, one in the middle of each slot.

He held it there a moment.

"Fits?" said Len, from outside.

"Fits," said Ricky.

"Good," said Len. "Drill it."

* * *

The case of bits was a flat plastic box with the sizes printed in a row along the lid. Ricky opened it and ran his finger along the row until he found nine-thirty-seconds.

The nine-thirty-seconds was long.

The others were ordinary, the length of the ones he'd used at school, the length of a pencil stub. This one was a foot long, a thin straight shaft with the flutes only at the far end, lying across the top of the others in the case because it would not fit in its slot. It had a piece of masking tape wrapped around the shank near the back with 9/32 on it in marker, as if in case someone doubted it.

He had seen these. At school there had been one in a drawer, for reaching through things. He had never used it.

He put it in the drill. It was the size. The size was what the drawing said.

He climbed up into the compartment with the drill and knelt facing the wall, with the drill held level at the first cross, the long bit out in front of it like a lance. It was a bit awkward. The drill was a long way from the wall, and the tip of the bit wandered on the silver cross before it bit, and he had to lean in to steady it, with his weight behind the drill.

He had done this a hundred times. You leaned in, and the bit bit, and you kept the pressure on, and the chips came off in curls, and then there was that moment when the bit broke through the far side and the drill jumped forward an inch because there was suddenly nothing in front of it.

The bit bit. The chips came off in curls, bright, and piled on the compartment floor. He kept the pressure on. He had his weight behind it.

The bit broke through.

The drill jumped forward, the way drills did.

It did not jump an inch. It went on going. It went on going the length of a foot-long bit, with Ricky's weight behind it, until the chuck hit the wall with a dull clang, and in the space of that forward rush, which was maybe half a second, there was a second, smaller sound: a sort of flat tick, somewhere on the other side of the wall, very close, like somebody flicking a fingernail against a tin can.

Ricky stopped.

He knelt there with the drill still buried to the chuck in the compartment wall and did not move. The drill hummed down. It was quiet in the compartment. Outside, he could hear Len stop caulking.

There was a pause.

Then Len's voice said, from outside, from the curbside, in a tone of pure interest: "Well, there it is."

* * *

Ricky climbed out of the compartment with the drill in his hand and the long bit sticking out of the front of it, and dropped down onto the shop floor, and walked around to the outside of the truck.

Len was standing at the curbside panel, looking at a spot on it at about the height of his chest.

There was a hole in it.

It was a small, round, neat hole, the size of the bit exactly, with a little bright curl of aluminum standing up out of it on the outside, like the collar of a shirt. Around the hole the panel was otherwise perfect, flat and bright and smooth.

Ricky looked at it.

"Stop collar," said Len. He said it gently, the way you'd tell somebody their shoe was untied. "Nobody gave you a stop collar?"

"What's a stop collar?"

Len looked at him. Then he reached over, took the drill out of Ricky's hand, and held the long bit up to the light, and showed him, with his thumb, the place on the shank where a little steel ring would have gone, with a set screw in it, to stop the bit from going any deeper than you wanted.

"There's supposed to be one in the case," Len said. He opened the case. There was a slot in it for one. It was empty.

He closed the case.

"Well," he said. "Now you know."

* * *

The moustache came over from fab at five past eight pulling the old blue welder on its cart, Ricky's, with the gun coiled on top, because somebody had gone and told him, because a thing said on this floor got to the other end of it faster than a person could walk.

He looked at the hole, and then at Ricky. He did not say anything for a moment, and it was not the good kind of nothing,

or the bad kind; it was the kind of nothing a person uses while he's working something out.

"Inside," he said. "You hold the backing."

The backing was a block of copper about the size of a deck of cards, on a handle, that came out of a drawer on the blue cart. Ricky climbed back up into the compartment and found the hole from the inside, his hole, the one he'd meant to make, at his first silver cross, and put his eye to it, and saw light through it, and through that, an inch away, the other hole, the one he hadn't meant to make, with Len's shape moving past it outside.

He held the copper block flat against the back of the outside panel, behind the second hole, reaching in through the access hole at the bottom of the compartment wall and up into the gap between the two walls as far as his arm would go. The moustache called "Got it?" from outside, and Ricky called back "Got it," and heard the arc strike.

The copper block got warm in his hand. Then it got hot. He held it. The arc went on for what felt like a long time and was probably seven or eight seconds, and then stopped.

"Okay," said the moustache.

Ricky took the block away and climbed out.

Outside, where the hole had been, there was a small round grey button of weld on the bare panel, a little proud of the surface, like a rivet head. The moustache took a sanding disc to it, lightly, carefully, not the grinder but a little air sander with a soft pad, and took the button down, and down, feathering the edges out into the panel, stopping often to run his fingers over

it with his eyes closed, until he could not feel it anymore and neither, when he told Ricky to try, could Ricky.

There was a patch of dull, sanded aluminum on the bare panel, about the size of a coin, a different grey from the rest. That was all.

The moustache coiled the lead back over the blue cart.

“Put a stop on it,” he said. “Next three.”

“There isn’t one.”

The moustache looked at Len. Len went and got one from his own toolbox, out of a little plastic drawer full of them, and held it out, and the moustache took it and set it on the long bit himself, a quarter inch past the flutes, and tightened the set screw, and handed the drill back to Ricky.

“Next three,” he said, and went back to fab, pulling the welder behind him.

He had not said anything else. Ricky had been braced for him to say something else, for most of the time he’d been holding the copper block, and he had not.

* * *

Ricky drilled the next three.

He knelt in the compartment with the stop collar on the bit and leaned in and felt the bit break through, and the drill jump forward, a quarter inch, and stop, with the collar against the wall. He did it three times. Each time, the drill jumped a quarter inch and stopped. Each time, he climbed down and walked around to the outside of the truck and looked at the

curbside panel, at chest height, and it was flat and bright, except for the one dull coin-sized patch, which was where it had been.

Len watched him do this the second time and did not say anything. The third time he said, "It's fine, Rook," and Ricky said, "I know," and went and looked anyway.

They hung the bracket before ten. Len held it and Ricky ran the bolts through from the inside, into nuts that Len held on the back through an access hole with a pair of needle-nose pliers and a great deal of swearing, and it went up, and it was level, and it sat on the wall with its four bolts in its four slots, per vendor drawing, at the height a person of average height could reach, per the customer.

It was a good bracket. It fit.

* * *

The paint lead came late in the morning.

Ricky was sweeping the bay, which was the only thing left. He had swept it twice. He was sweeping it again. The paint lead came around the front of the body with a grease pencil in his hand and his respirator hanging around his neck by its strap, and he walked down the curbside, slowly, looking at the big bare panel the way the moustache had looked at the frame, with his head a little on one side, until he got to the coin-sized patch.

He stopped.

He looked at it. He put his fingers on it, and ran them over it, and kept them there a while, and took them off. Then he uncapped the grease pencil and drew a neat circle around it,

about the size of a saucer, and wrote something beside it in letters Ricky couldn't read from where he was, and capped the pencil.

Then he turned around and looked straight at Ricky.

Ricky had been trying, all the way down the panel, to look like a person sweeping. He stopped sweeping.

"That yours?" said the paint lead.

"Yes."

The paint lead nodded. He did not raise his voice. He did not need to. He had the flat, level, unhurried voice of a man who spends his days behind a yellow line in a white suit making things perfect, and who is going to have to spend an extra part of one of those days making one particular thing perfect again.

"That's your one free pass," he said. "Don't let it happen again."

He put the grease pencil back in his pocket, and pulled the respirator strap back up around his neck, and went back the way he had come, around the front of the truck, toward paint.

Ricky stood with the broom.

He had spent two weeks not knowing what you never said to paint. It had been on the list of things nobody explained, with the long table and the coffee maker on the right and fab and electrical. He had assumed it was a word, a particular word, some joke or insult that had been said once to a painter years ago and never forgotten.

He still didn't know what the word was. But he thought now that it was probably something like *That's mine*.

* * *

At lunch the window table already knew.

Ricky could tell as soon as he came in. Nobody said anything. Nobody looked up. It was just that when he sat down, next to the moustache, and the moustache moved his chips over, there was a small pause in the conversation, the length of a breath, and then the conversation started again about something else, the way it had started again after the delivery man.

He ate half his sandwich in it.

Then Dale, who had been telling a story about his brother-in-law's boat, stopped in the middle of the story, and said, to nobody, in the same voice:

"Fire hall in Abbotsford. Pumper. Went through the compartment wall and into the fuel tank." He took a bite of his sandwich. "It was empty. Nobody tells you that part. They were testing me with an empty one."

"They weren't testing you," said one of the Marks.

"It was empty."

"It was empty because it was new," said the other Mark. He looked at his sandwich. "Mine was a light. A clearance light. The wire for it. Went straight through the wall and through the wire, and the light went out. On a brand-new body. Took electrical two days to find it." He paused. "They were not happy."

"Electrical," somebody said, darkly.

"I didn't talk to them," said the Mark. "I let Walt talk to them."

Everybody at the window table turned and looked at the long table.

Walt did not look up from his paper. He turned a page.

"Nineteen ninety-four," he said. "Tank truck. Stainless. Went through the head." He turned another page. "It was full."

The window table was silent.

"Of what?" said Ricky.

Walt considered him over the top of the paper.

"Water," he said. "Test water. We were testing it." He went back to the paper. "It was a good test. It found the hole."

The moustache ate a chip.

"Tailgate," he said. "My second week." He did not elaborate, and nobody asked him to.

Ricky finished his sandwich.

* * *

In the afternoon he was back at the table with the moustache, and there was a frame, a small one, a plain one, no kickup, and he ran crossmembers on it and let the first inch wet in every time, and it was a slow afternoon, and nothing happened in it.

At two he walked Harjit's drill back up to the parts window, and put it on the counter with the batteries and the case of bits.

Harjit opened the case, the way he probably opened every case that came back to him, and ran his finger along the row, and stopped at the empty slot where the stop collar should have been.

"You lose it?"

"It wasn't in there."

Harjit looked at the slot for a moment. He took a stop collar out of a drawer under the counter and pressed it into the slot and closed the case.

“Now it is,” he said, and put the case on the shelf behind him with the others.

* * *

When the horn went, Ricky walked out the long way again, past assembly, past the third bay.

The body was still there. Len had gone. The bracket was on the wall in the curbside compartment, where he couldn't see it from here, and the doors were still on their cart in their tape. On the big bare curbside panel, at about chest height, there was a grease-pencil circle about the size of a saucer, with something written beside it. From here it was the only mark on the panel. The patch inside it was too small to see.

He went out through the shipping door.

In the lot the tailgates were down and the talk was about the weekend. Somebody was going to Harrison. Somebody was not going to the hill ever again, for reasons that involved a deer, or possibly a dog. Nobody asked Ricky whether he rode.

He would not have wanted to be asked.

He got in his car and sat with the door open until the heat was out of it, and then shut the door, and drove home, and did not look at his phone.

THREE

MONDAY

THE WHITEBOARD HAD changed over the weekend.

Ricky saw it on his way in, because he looked now. Table twelve still had its row. But where the next frame would have been, somebody had wiped the square clean and written, in the foreman's blue, *ASSY 3*, and after that, in the next square, a job number, and after that a question mark in red. Further down the board there was a new row nobody was on yet. It had a job number and, next to it in small capitals, *CHWK FD*, and nothing else.

"Assembly," said the moustache, when Ricky got to the table. He was putting his lunch in a different bag, a cooler, as if he was going somewhere. "This week. Both of us."

"Why?"

"Frames are caught up. Assembly isn't." He zipped the cooler. "Bring your helmet. You won't need it. Bring it anyway."

They walked down the shop together, past the brake, where Tony was counting, and past paint. The paint booth doors were shut, and through the little window in one of them Ricky could see a body standing inside under the lights, masked in brown

paper along the bottom, sprayed a dull grey primer all over. It was bare aluminum underneath, he knew. He could not see the curbside from here. He did not try.

* * *

Bay three had a new body in it.

It was bigger than the hose-reel one. It was a utility body for a power company, the moustache said, with compartment towers down both sides, tall ones, floor to roof, and between the towers at the front, across the width of the bed, a space where something was going to go. The towers were in. They were welded to the floor and to each other along the top, and the inside faces of them, where they looked across the gap at each other, were smooth and bare and exactly parallel, or looked it.

Len was there, on a stepladder, running caulk along the top seam of the curbside tower. He looked down.

"Rook," he said. "Coffee's on the cart."

There was a coffee on the cart. Ricky drank some. It was from the left.

"What goes here?" Ricky said, looking at the gap between the towers.

"Shelving unit," said the moustache. "Comes over from fab tomorrow. Slides in between, bolts through both walls. Drawing's there."

The drawing was on the cart beside the coffee, clipped to a board. It was the body from above and from the side and from the front, and in the front view, between the towers, there was

a dimension with arrows at both ends that said $48 \frac{1}{8}$, and inside that, drawn as a separate box, the shelving unit, with its own dimension across the front that said 48.

“Eighth of an inch,” said Ricky.

“Sixteenth a side,” said the moustache. “Slides right in.”

“That’s not much.”

The moustache looked at the drawing and then at him with an expression of mild surprise, as if Ricky had pointed out that the sky was not very high.

“It’s what it says,” said the moustache. “Drawings are always right.”

* * *

The morning was liners.

The inside faces of the towers, the ones that looked across the gap at each other, got a liner: a sheet of thin aluminum with a pattern pressed into it, riveted over the smooth wall. Len cut them. The moustache fit them. Ricky held them and handed rivets.

“Linemen,” Len said, from the shear, by way of explanation, when Ricky asked what the liners were for. “Hydro guys. They don’t put tools in a compartment. They throw them in. From the ground. Like horseshoes.” He fed a sheet into the shear and brought the blade down, and a long strip of aluminum dropped off the far side. “Come back in five years and look at the inside of one of these. Looks like somebody shot it.”

“Why don’t they just put them in?”

Len thought about it.

“You’d have to ask a lineman,” he said, in a tone that suggested he had, once, and would not again.

Ricky carried the first liner over from the shear by himself. It was a full sheet, four feet by eight, and not heavy, and he carried it flat in front of him like a tray, and when he got to the roll-up door between the shear and the bays a breeze came in off the yard and got under it.

The sheet lifted. It lifted the way a sail lifts, all at once, and for a moment Ricky was not so much carrying it as being led by it, two quick steps sideways toward the yard, the liner up at an angle over his head like a man holding an umbrella in a gale.

Len caught the far end of it without looking up from the shear.

“Edge-on through doors,” he said. “Never flat.”

Ricky turned it edge-on. It stopped being a sail. He carried it the rest of the way to bay three like a man carrying a very thin door, and did not look back to see who had seen, and several people had.

It was the first time he had used a rivet gun. It was an air one, a pneumatic puller, heavy, with a hose that followed you around like a dog, and you put a rivet in the hole and the nose of the gun on the rivet and pulled the trigger, and the gun made a sound like a very small gunshot and a very large hiccup at the same time, and the stem of the rivet snapped off and flew out the back into a jar, and the rivet was set. The head of it sat on the surface of the liner, a little domed button, one after another in rows.

His first one went in crooked. He had pressed too hard, and the gun had pulled the rivet in at a tilt, so that the head sat on the liner leaning, like a thumbtack pushed in with a sideways thumb.

“Don’t press so hard,” said the moustache. “You’re not driving it. It pulls itself.”

He took a drill with a small bit and drilled the head off the crooked rivet, carefully, down the middle, until the head spun free and fell off into his palm, and then tapped what was left of the rivet through into the hollow of the tower with a punch. He put the head in Ricky’s hand.

“Again.”

Ricky didn’t press so hard. The next one set flat, a small domed button standing up off the liner, and so did the one after that.

By ten there were two liners up, one on each tower, facing each other across the gap, each with its rows of small domed buttons. The moustache stood back and looked at them and nodded.

“Now it’s a body,” he said.

Len came down off the stepladder and handed Ricky the caulking gun.

“Top seam, streetside,” he said. “Your turn.”

Ricky climbed up. Len showed him from below: the tip cut at an angle, the gun pushed, not pulled, along the seam, a steady bead, and then, and this was the part, a finger dipped in a cup of soapy water and run along the bead in one pass to smooth it into the corner.

“One pass,” said Len. “Don’t go back.”

Ricky ran the bead. It was a little thick in the middle and a little thin at the end, but it was a bead. He dipped his finger in the soapy water and ran it along. He went back.

“Don’t go back,” said Len.

He had already gone back. There was now caulk on his finger, and his thumb, and a smear of it on his sleeve where he had tried to wipe his thumb, and a small grey ridge in the middle of the seam where his finger had lifted and set down again.

Len looked up at it for a while from the floor of the bay.

“It’s on the top,” he said finally. “Nobody’s going to look at the top.”

He took the gun back.

* * *

The man in the cut-off sleeves came over from fab at half past ten with a compartment door.

He carried it by himself, on his shoulder, the way you’d carry a surfboard, a tall door for a tall compartment, brushed aluminum with a stainless handle and a piano hinge down one edge already on it, and a gasket all the way around. He came into the bay without saying anything, walked past the cart and past Ricky and past the moustache, and stopped at the streetside tower, at the third compartment from the front, which had no door.

He set the door down on its bottom edge. He looked at the opening.

He did not measure it. Ricky, who was holding a liner panel for the moustache and could see past it, watched him not measure it. He did not have a tape on him that Ricky could see. He had a drill in his back pocket and a handful of screws in his other hand and nothing else.

He lifted the door into the opening, one-handed, and held it there against the frame, and put the first screw through the hinge into the tower, and drove it. Then the second. Then he went down the hinge, screw, screw, screw, not fast, not slow, the drill making the same short sound each time, and at the bottom he let go of the door.

It stayed.

He swung it shut. It closed with a sound Ricky knew from the first day: a small sound, and then the last quarter inch, where it seated itself.

He opened it again and looked at the gap between the door and the opening, all the way round, once, the way he had looked at the tab in the little brake. Then he closed it and went back to fab the way he had come.

He had been in the bay about four minutes.

“Clamp,” said the moustache.

Ricky gave him the clamp.

* * *

When the moustache went for rivets, Ricky went and looked at the door.

He opened it and closed it. It closed the same way. He opened it again and looked at the gap where the door met the opening,

the way the man in the cut-off sleeves had looked at it. It was even. It was the same width at the top as at the bottom, the same on the hinge side as on the handle side. He put the edge of his thumbnail into it, at the top, and slid it down the side and along the bottom and up the other side, and his thumbnail fit the gap all the way round, just fit, not loose, not tight.

He did not have a tape. He still did not have a tape; he'd been borrowing one for two weeks and meaning to buy one. He went and borrowed Len's and came back and measured the gap anyway, at the top and the bottom and both sides. It was an eighth. It was an eighth everywhere.

He looked at the opening, and at the door, and down the shop toward fab, where the fifth table was, and the man in the cut-off sleeves was bent over something with his back to the aisle.

"Rook," said Len, from the stepladder. "My tape."

Ricky gave it back.

* * *

At noon the foreman went out the back. At lunch the window table was talking about a truck that somebody's cousin was selling, which everybody agreed was too much money and several people were thinking about buying anyway.

"Assembly?" said one of the Marks.

"Bay three," said Ricky.

"The hydro job?"

"Yeah."

The Mark nodded, and considered it, and delivered his verdict.

“Towers,” he said.

It seemed to be a complete statement. Nobody asked him to explain it, and Ricky, who had been at Titan for two weeks now, did not either.

At the long table Walt was eating his sandwich. He had the paper folded to a page of classified ads and was going down them with the end of a pencil, not marking anything, just going down them. Ricky watched the pencil for a while. It stopped at one ad, and stayed there, and then went on.

* * *

In the afternoon the moustache fit a partition in the curbside tower.

It was a flat sheet with flanges bent on three sides, and it went in between two compartments to separate them, and before he fit it the moustache measured it and measured the space it was going into and looked at the drawing.

“Twenty-two and three-quarters,” he said.

He put it in. It went in, flush, the flanges sitting against the tower walls with no gap and no fight, the way things went in on the drawing.

“There you go,” said the moustache.

He riveted it. Ricky handed rivets.

“You said that before,” said Ricky, while they were doing it. “About drawings.”

“What about them?”

“That they’re always right.”

The moustache pulled the trigger. The rivet set. The stem flew into the jar.

“Well,” he said, reaching for the next rivet, “that one was right.” He said it without any irony at all, the way you’d say that one was green. “They’re always right. You find a drawing that isn’t, you let me know.”

Ricky handed him the next rivet.

* * *

At two the moustache sent him to measure for tomorrow.

“The gap,” he said. “Between the towers. Top, middle, bottom, front and back. Write them on the wall.”

“On the wall?”

“On the liner, in marker. Small. Where the shelf’ll cover it.”

Ricky borrowed Len’s tape again. He climbed up on the bed of the body, between the towers, and hooked the tape on the liner of the curbside tower, at the top, at the front, where the rows of rivet heads were, and ran it across the gap to the liner of the streetside tower, and read it.

Forty-eight and an eighth.

He wrote $48 \frac{1}{8}$ on the liner, small, in the silver marker, just under the top row of rivets.

He did the middle. Forty-eight and an eighth. He did the bottom. Forty-eight and an eighth, maybe a hair under, but he looked at the hair for a long time and decided it was the width of the line on the tape and not the gap. He did the back, top,

middle, bottom. Forty-eight and an eighth. Forty-eight and an eighth. Forty-eight and an eighth.

Then, because it was the kind of thing he did now, he went and borrowed the moustache's tape, and did them all again.

The moustache's tape said the same thing. The two tapes, which were different brands, and different ages, and had been dropped off different things for different numbers of years, agreed, top to bottom, front to back, to the line.

He wrote a small check mark after each number.

At half past two a man Ricky didn't know came through the bay with a clipboard. He was about forty, thin, with a pen behind each ear, and a look of somebody who has been walking between buildings all day. He stopped and looked at the towers, and at the liners, and at the six small silver numbers going up.

"Who's writing on my liner?"

"Me," said Ricky, from the bed of the truck.

The man read the numbers. He read all of them, top to bottom, front and back. He looked at the drawing on the cart.

"Good," he said, and wrote something on his clipboard, and went on through the bay toward shipping.

"Fab lead," said Len, when he'd gone. "Everything that leaves fab goes past him." He considered this. "Everything that comes back goes past him too."

Ricky climbed down and looked at it from the floor: two towers, two liners facing each other with their rows of little domed rivet heads, and between them a gap that was exactly what the drawing said it would be, in six places, with six small silver numbers down the walls to prove it.

He stood there with it for a minute.

“Good?” said the moustache.

“Forty-eight and an eighth. Everywhere.”

“There you go,” said the moustache. “What’d I tell you.”

* * *

At three the moustache sent him back up to fab for a box of rivets off the table, and on the way past the fifth table he saw the shelving unit.

It was on a cart at the end of the fifth table, waiting to go over. It was bigger than he had pictured: a tall aluminum frame, four shelves, each with a lip at the front so things wouldn’t slide off, and on each side a flat vertical plate with bolt holes in it, where it would bolt through into the tower walls. It was welded. Every joint was welded, grey and even. There was a traveller on it in a plastic sleeve.

The man in the cut-off sleeves was not at the fifth table. The cart was just there.

Ricky looked at it for a moment. Then, because he had the moustache’s tape in his hand, and nobody was there, he hooked the tape on one side plate and ran it across the front of the shelving unit to the other.

Forty-eight.

He did it at the top. Forty-eight. At the bottom. Forty-eight.

He put the tape back in his pocket.

* * *

When the horn went, Ricky walked out to the lot and stopped at his car, and then, instead of getting in, he walked back up the row to where the moustache's pickup was, a grey Tacoma with a toolbox across the bed. The moustache was putting his cooler in the cab.

"I need a tape," Ricky said. "Where do you get one?"

The moustache looked at him.

"Payday's Friday," he said. "Get one Monday."

"Why Monday?"

"Because you'll have money Monday." He got in the truck.

"Till then, borrow Len's. He likes it."

He started the truck and drove off down the row.

TUESDAY

THEY BROUGHT THE shelving unit over from fab themselves, first thing, on its cart: Ricky pushing, the moustache steering by one corner, down the aisle past the brake and around paint and into bay three, where Len was waiting with a coffee on the cart for Ricky and a second stepladder.

It took the three of them to get it up onto the bed of the body. It was not heavy so much as large, a tall aluminum cage of shelves with a lip on each, and it wanted to tip whichever way you weren't holding it. They stood it on the bed at the front, in front of the gap between the two towers, facing in. Above the gap, on both liners, under the top rows of rivets, Ricky's six silver numbers looked down at it. 48 1/8, with a check mark.

"Straight in," said the moustache. "Square. Don't let it rack."

He took one side. Ricky took the other. Len stood on the bed behind it with his hands flat on the back of the frame.

"Go."

They pushed.

The shelving unit went in. The front edges of its side plates slid into the gap between the two liners and went in an inch,

and then two, smooth, aluminum on aluminum, with the sound of a drawer closing.

Then it stopped.

It did not stop like something hitting a wall. It stopped like a drawer that has come to the end of its runners, a small soft stop, and then nothing. They pushed. It didn't go. Len leaned on it. It didn't go. It sat there with three inches of it in the gap and the rest of it sticking out into the body, square, level, not racked, perfectly still.

"Back it out," said the moustache.

They backed it out. It came out easily. They lined it up again, more carefully, and pushed, and it went in three inches, and stopped, in the same place.

* * *

The moustache did what Ricky had watched Tony do with the first angle on Monday of last week. He got his tape out.

He measured the gap, top, middle, bottom, beside Ricky's numbers and their check marks. Forty-eight and an eighth. He measured the shelving unit. Forty-eight. He looked at the drawing, and folded it, and put it on the bed of the truck.

"Hold that end," he said. "We'll try it again. Slower."

Ricky held that end.

* * *

They pushed it in slower. It went in its three inches. It stopped.

The moustache said something under his breath and leaned on his end, and Ricky, on his end, with his face close to the

streetside tower, a foot from the liner, looking along the gap between the side plate and the wall, saw it.

The side plate of the shelving unit was not touching the liner.

It was touching the rivets.

The top row of rivets, the domed ones he had set himself yesterday, a little button standing up off the liner every few inches, was holding the side plate off the wall. The plate had slid in along the tops of them, and ridden up onto them, and stopped where the second row began, and there was a sliver of light between the plate and the flat of the liner, the width of a rivet head.

He looked across the shelving unit at the other tower. He couldn't see the gap on that side. He didn't need to. He had set those rivets too.

And the corner. At the front corner of the side plate, where it met the frame of the shelving unit, there was a weld, grey and even like every weld from fab, a neat fillet running up the corner, and it stood out past the face of the plate, just a little, the way a fillet did. It was touching the liner too, down low.

Ricky stood there holding his end and did the arithmetic.

It was not hard arithmetic. It was the kind he had done in a classroom in Burnaby with a whiteboard, on a unit that came right after Bend Allowance and Developed Length, called Tolerances and Fits. The instructor had stood at the front with a stack of washers, and put them one on top of another, and said that every washer was within its tolerance, and then he'd measured the stack and it was not what anybody would have predicted by looking at the box, because every washer was a

tiny bit thick in the same direction. *Stack-up*, he had written on the board. *Every part is right. The assembly isn't.*

The gap was right. The shelf was right. The drawing was right. The rivets weren't on it.

"It's the rivets," Ricky said.

The moustache looked up.

"The rivets. The heads. They stand up off the liner." He pointed down the gap with his free hand. "It's riding on them. Both sides. A sixteenth a side, that's the eighth. That's all of it. It's a — " He looked for the word, and found it, and it came out sounding like something he'd read off a whiteboard, which it was. "It's a stack-up. Every part's right. They just all add up the same way."

The moustache looked at him for a moment.

Then he looked at the drawing on the bed of the truck.

"Drawing's right," he said.

"I know. That's what I'm — the drawing's right, it's just —"

"Then it fits," said the moustache, and set his shoulder to his end. "On three."

They pushed on three. It went in its three inches and stopped.

Len got the rubber mallet.

He did not use it hard. He used it the way you'd knock on a door you weren't sure you wanted to be answered, three soft taps on the back of the frame of the shelving unit, and the shelving unit took the taps and did not go anywhere.

"Harder," said the moustache.

Len hit it harder. It did not go anywhere, harder.

"Wax," said Len. "Bit of wax on the plates."

"It's not sticking," said Ricky. "It's —"

"Wax," said Len, and went and got a stub of it from somewhere, a grey candle-end of paraffin that looked older than Ricky, and ran it along the outside faces of both side plates, and they pushed again, and it went its three inches, a little more smoothly, and stopped in exactly the same place.

Len looked at the wax in his hand as if it had let him down personally.

"Take the liner off," said Len.

"Drawing's got a liner," said the moustache.

"Take it off and put it back."

"Then it's the same liner."

Len thought about this, and appeared to accept it, and put the wax in his pocket.

* * *

Len went and got the fab lead.

The fab lead came into the bay before eight with his clipboard and his two pens, and looked at the shelving unit sitting three inches into the gap, and did not say anything. He got his own tape out and measured the gap and the shelf. He looked at Ricky's numbers, and at the drawing.

Everything measured.

He looked at the shelving unit for a long moment, and then down the side of it, and Ricky watched his eyes go along the gap between the side plate and the liner, and stop.

He didn't say anything.

“Drawing,” he said instead, and held his hand out, and Len gave it to him. He looked at it and then at Ricky.

“You. Bring it.” He handed Ricky the drawing. “We’re going to Design.”

* * *

The fab lead walked fast. He went up the shop down the middle of the aisle with his clipboard under his arm, not looking at anything, and Ricky followed him with the drawing, a half step back and to the left, and nobody at any of the tables looked up.

They went through the steel door and down the office hallway, past the grey desks, to the last door on the left.

The man in the cardigan was at his two monitors.

He looked up, and he looked at the fab lead, and at Ricky, and at the drawing in Ricky’s hand. Then, before anybody said anything, he reached behind him without getting up and opened a drawer of the flat file, and began taking things out of it.

“Shelving unit,” said the fab lead. “Bay three. Won’t go.”

“Yes,” said the man in the cardigan.

* * *

He laid it out on the desk the way he had laid out the bracket. The drawing, first. Then, one at a time, the other things.

“The towers,” he said, “are forty-eight and a quarter apart, wall to wall. That comes from the standard tower drawing, Revision B.” A drawing. “The tower wall is where it says it is. You measured it.”

“We measured it.”

“The liner was added to this customer’s towers in Revision D.” Another drawing, with a D in the corner. “At their request. This letter.” A letter, on the power company’s letterhead, from a few years ago. “Their linemen throw tools into the compartments. The tools were wearing through the tower walls. They asked for a liner. Revision D adds the liner, a sixteenth of an inch thick, both sides, and takes the opening down to forty-eight and an eighth.” He put his finger on a number. “It’s accounted for. The forty-eight and an eighth on your drawing is to the face of the liner.”

“It’s to the face of the liner,” the fab lead agreed. “We measured to the face of the liner.”

“The shelving unit is forty-eight.” Another sheet: a specification, typed, with the power company’s name at the top. “That comes from the customer’s specification, paragraph six. They want the shelving unit to accept a standard parts bin, and the bin is a particular width, and they give the width here, and the shelving unit is drawn to that plus the plates.” He turned the sheet over. On the back, in the small, even pencil, a note: *per cust. spec 6 — taken from shelving in their prev. unit (not ours), their measurement.*

“The shelf’s right,” said the fab lead.

“The shelf is right,” said the man in the cardigan.

He laid a last sheet on top. It was a bill of materials, a long typed list of parts, with a column of numbers down the side, and he ran his finger down it and stopped on a line: rivets, blind, aluminum, dome head, and a quantity.

“The rivets,” said the man in the cardigan, “are on the bill of materials. They are not on the drawing. The heads stand a sixteenth off the face of the liner. The drawing is to the face of the liner.” He took his finger off the line. “That’s the eighth.”

He looked up at the fab lead, and then, briefly, at Ricky, and then back at the fab lead.

“The welds at the corners of the side plates add a little more. And the towers are within a sixteenth of parallel, which is the tolerance, and they’re at the tight end of it at the bottom.” He paused. “Every number is right.”

“Every number is right,” said the fab lead.

“It’s happened before,” said the man in the cardigan. He did not look anything up. “Job twenty-one oh seven, the streetside partition, same liner. Twenty-one forty-four, a shelving unit, same customer. Twenty-one ninety, a drawer bank, a different customer, a different liner, same rivets. And in the spring, twenty-two thirteen, which was a toolbox, and was not a liner at all, but a hinge.” He said the job numbers the way Walt said years, as dates in a life. “The clearance should be three-sixteenths. It should be three-sixteenths wherever a liner is riveted. I’ll write it in.”

“You said that on twenty-one forty-four,” said the fab lead.

“I did,” said the man in the cardigan. “It’s in the standard. The standard is Revision F.” He touched the tower drawing, the one with the D in the corner. “This job was drawn to Revision D, because the customer’s contract references Revision D. I’ll write it in again.” He took a pencil. “I’ll write it on D.”

The fab lead looked at the desk, at the little stack of history the man in the cardigan had laid out for him, every sheet of it right.

Then he let out a breath.

It was long. It was a long, slow breath that went on longer than breaths usually did, as if it had been waiting a while to come out, and had come a long way, from 2107 and 2144 and 2190 and a hinge in the spring.

The man in the cardigan waited for it to finish. Then he wrote something on the drawing, in pencil, small, and dated it.

"Thank you," said the fab lead.

"Thank you," said the man in the cardigan, and went back to his two monitors.

* * *

They walked back down the hallway more slowly.

The fab lead had his clipboard under his arm and his eyes on the floor ten feet ahead of him.

At the steel door he stopped, and looked at Ricky.

"You're the one who wrote on my liner," said the fab lead.

"Yes."

The fab lead nodded, and looked at the door, and pushed it open, and the noise of the floor came through.

"Your numbers were good," he said, and went through.

* * *

At lunch one of the Marks looked across the window table at Ricky.

“Bay three?”

“Yeah.”

“Shelf go in?”

“No.”

The Mark nodded slowly, with a kind of satisfaction, the way a man nods who has seen the end of a film before.

“Towers,” he said.

Ricky looked at him.

* * *

After lunch the moustache fit another partition, in the next compartment back from the shelving unit, and before he fit it, he had Ricky measure.

“Space,” he said. “And the partition.”

Ricky measured the space. He measured the partition. Then, because it was Tuesday and he had been kneeling beside a shelving unit all morning, he got down and looked along the liner where the partition’s flange would sit, at the row of domed rivet heads running across it.

“Rivets,” he said.

The moustache looked at him. Then he picked up the partition and turned it over and showed him the flange along its edge: bent at ninety, and then bent again, a little jog in it, a quarter of an inch, so that the flat of the flange stood off the liner by exactly the height it needed to stand off something.

“Joggled,” said the moustache. “Clears them.”

He fit it. It went in flush, the joggle riding over the rivet heads and the flat of the flange sitting where it should.

“See,” said the moustache, and riveted it.
Ricky handed him rivets.

* * *

In the afternoon, back in bay three, the fab lead came through once more and stopped at the moustache, who was fitting a partition on the other tower.

“Rivets,” said the fab lead.
The moustache stopped.
“Rivets,” he said.

He climbed up onto the bed of the body and got down on one knee beside the shelving unit, which was still sitting there three inches into the gap, and looked along the side plate, the way Ricky had, a foot from the liner. He stayed there a while. He ran his thumb along the top row of domed heads.

“Huh,” he said.

“Pull the rivets tomorrow,” said the fab lead. “Everywhere the shelf goes. Low-profile heads back in. And grind the corner welds flush. I’ll get you a drawing.” He looked at the drawing he already had. “I’ll get you a note on the drawing.”

“Low-profile,” said the moustache.

The fab lead went.

The moustache stayed on one knee beside the shelving unit for a little longer, looking at the rivets. Then he stood up, and dusted off his knee, and looked at the drawing on the bed of the truck, where it had been all day, folded.

He did not look at Ricky. He picked up the drawing and unfolded it and looked at the two numbers, $48 \frac{1}{8}$ and 48, in blue, with their arrows.

“Drawing’s right,” he said. “It’s the rivets.”

And he folded it again, along its folds, and went back to his partition.

* * *

When the horn went, the shelving unit was still there, three inches into the gap, square, level, not racked, waiting for tomorrow.

Ricky stood on the floor of the bay for a minute and looked at it. Above it, on both liners, just under the top rows of rivets, his six silver numbers with their six check marks.

He walked out through the shipping door and around to the lot. At his car he stopped, and stood with his hand on the roof, which was hot.

Tolerances and Fits. The washers. The instructor with his stack, and the thing he’d written on the board.

He had got ninety-one on that one. He had thought, at the time, that it was the least useful unit in the program.

WEDNESDAY

THE NOTE WAS on the drawing when Ricky got in, clipped to the board on the cart beside his coffee.

It was in the fab lead's handwriting, in black pen, in a box he had drawn in the margin himself: *LINER RIVETS IN SHELF PATH — DRILL OUT, REPLACE LOW-PROFILE. GRIND S/P CORNER FILLETS FLUSH. PER DESIGN.* And under that, smaller, in the small, even pencil hand, *clearance to be 3/16 where liner riveted — noted Rev D,* and a date.

The shelving unit was where they had left it, three inches into the gap, waiting.

“Out,” said the moustache.

They backed it out, the three of them, and set it down on the bed of the body, and Len went to get the low-profile rivets from Harjit, and the moustache handed Ricky a drill with a small bit already in it.

“You know how,” he said.

* * *

Ricky did know how. He had watched it done once, on Monday, on the crooked one.

He climbed up between the towers and knelt on the bed of the truck, facing the streetside liner. The top row of rivets ran along it at the height of his chin, little domed buttons, one every few inches, grey, all set flat and square, all his. The shelf path was the front three feet of the liner, top to bottom, on both towers. He counted the rivets in it and then decided he did not want to know the number, and stopped counting.

He put the bit on the first one.

“Down the middle,” said the moustache, from below. “Let it find the stem. Don’t lean.”

Ricky didn’t lean. The bit found the little hole in the centre of the rivet head, where the stem had snapped off, and went down into it, and the head began to spin, and then came free all at once and dropped into his palm, a tiny aluminum hat. He tapped the body of the rivet through with a punch and it fell away into the hollow of the tower with a faint tick.

He did the next one.

Tony went past the bay on his way somewhere, with a clipboard, and slowed, and looked up at Ricky on his knees with the drill.

“Rivets?”

“Rivets.”

“Liner?”

“Yeah.”

Tony nodded, the way a doctor nods, and went on.

It was slow work, and quiet, and it was his own work. Each head dropped into his palm. When his palm was full he emptied it into the jar with the stems from Monday, which had been sitting on the cart ever since, half full of little snapped-off aluminum nails, and now began to fill up with little hats as well.

Around nine the safety officer came through bay three with his clipboard, and stopped just long enough to see that Ricky's glasses were on, and went on.

"Those were good rivets," said the moustache, at one point, looking up.

"I know."

"Nothing wrong with them."

"I know," said Ricky, and drilled out another one.

Halfway down the streetside liner the bit went dull. It stopped finding the stem and started skating on the rivet heads, and a thin curl of aluminum came off instead of a head, and Ricky, who had been told once not to lean, leaned, and it skated farther.

"Harjit," said the moustache, without looking up.

Harjit was at his window with an orange. Ricky held up the dull bit. Harjit looked at it, and at Ricky, and went back into the shelves without looking at any of them and came back with a new bit of the same size, in a paper sleeve.

It had a stop collar on it.

It was set a quarter inch past the flutes, the same place the moustache had set the other one last Friday, with the set screw tight.

“It’s for rivets,” said Ricky. “It won’t go through anything. It’s a rivet.”

Harjit looked at him.

“Stop’s on it,” he said.

He wrote something on his clipboard and went back to his orange. Ricky walked back to bay three with the new bit in its sleeve and the stop collar on it, and put it in the drill, and did not take the collar off, and drilled out the rest of the streetside liner, and at no point did the bit try to go through anything.

* * *

Below him the moustache had the shelving unit on its back on the bed of the truck and was going at the corner welds with a flap disc.

He did not do it quickly. He took the flap disc to the first fillet, the neat grey weld running up the front corner of a side plate, and touched it, and stopped, and looked at it, and touched it again. The weld came down in a fine grey dust. He took it down until it was flush with the face of the plate, a bright flat seam of metal where the bead had been, and then ran his thumb over it, and then did the next one.

“These are good welds too,” he said.

Ricky looked down. “Whose?”

The moustache looked at the traveller on the shelving unit, in its sleeve. Then he looked down the shop toward fab, toward the fifth table, and didn't say anything, and went back to grinding.

A while later, without looking up, he said, "That thing. Yesterday. At school."

"Stack-up."

"They teach that?"

"One unit. Tolerances and Fits."

The moustache took the flap disc down the next fillet. "What'd it say to do about it?"

"Leave clearance."

"Drawing leaves clearance."

"Not enough."

The moustache ran his thumb over the ground seam. He seemed to think about this, the way he had thought about *how long do frames take*.

"Drawing's right," he said. "It's the rivets."

He went on to the next corner.

* * *

The estimator came into bay three mid-morning.

He came in the way he came into everything, down the middle, where he could be seen, with his clipboard, stopping to look. He looked at the body, and at the two towers, and at the liners, and at Ricky on his knees between them with a drill and a palm full of rivet heads. He looked at the shelving unit on its back, and at the moustache grinding, and at the traveller

on the body, where there was a box for estimated hours and a box for actual hours, and the actual was already bigger than the estimated, and not finished.

He wrote something down.

The fab lead came in behind him with his own clipboard. They stood side by side for a moment, two men with clipboards, looking at the same shelving unit, writing different things.

"Interference," said the fab lead.

"Interference," the estimator agreed.

"Again."

"Yes."

The fab lead looked at the shelving unit, and at the flap disc, and at the drill, and at the jar on the cart filling up with rivet heads.

"How often does this happen?" he said. He did not say it as if he expected an answer. He said it the way you'd say *why me* to the sky.

"Bodies with riveted liners," said the estimator, "take on interference time about one in seven. Across all of them." He did not look anything up. "Bodies without liners, about one in twenty. On average it adds three and a half hours. This one will be more. Shelving units are more."

The fab lead turned and looked at him.

"One in seven."

"Fourteen per cent. A little over."

The fab lead looked at the body again. Then he turned a little, and looked back up the shop, toward the other bays, where there were other bodies with other towers, some with liners,

some not, standing in their bays at various stages of being built, with men on stepladders and men lying underneath and a man carrying a door.

“So which one’s next?” he said. He said it half joking.

The estimator looked where he was looking.

He looked for a long time. He looked at each of the bays in turn, and at each body in it, the way he had looked at the eighteen-foot frame, reading. Ricky, on his knees between the towers with the drill in his hand, stopped drilling and watched him do it.

“One in seven,” the estimator said.

“Which one.”

“One in seven,” said the estimator again, the way he had said four and a quarter, as if it were all he had and he was giving the fab lead all of it. “Of the next seven with liners, one, on average. Maybe none. Maybe two.” He checked his clipboard. “Not which.”

The fab lead looked at him for a moment. Then he let out a breath, not the long one from Design, a shorter one, the ordinary kind, and nodded.

“Thanks,” he said.

“You’re welcome,” said the estimator, and wrote something down, and went on toward shipping.

* * *

The fab lead stayed. He looked at the shelving unit and at the jar of rivet heads and at Ricky.

“How many’ve you got out?”

Ricky looked at his palm and at the jar and at the liner. "Most of this side."

"Other side after."

"Yes."

The fab lead nodded. He looked at the two towers facing each other, at the one liner still full of domed heads and the other one bare now in a patch, three feet wide, a grid of small clean holes where the rivets had been.

"One in seven," he said, to nobody. And then, to Ricky, because Ricky was there: "Every one of them, somebody's drilling out rivets."

He went.

* * *

On the way to the lunchroom he went past paint. The big roll-up door at the end of the booth was open, and the hose-reel body was standing just outside it on its cab-and-chassis, finished, drying, in white. It was glossy white, the kind of white that looked wet. The curbside panel ran the length of the body, flat and bright, with the light from the high windows lying along it in one clean stripe.

Ricky looked at it at about the height of his chest. Then he went on to lunch.

At lunch the window table was talking about the hockey pool, which was apparently a different thing from the fantasy league and which had different, stricter rules, and a history. Tony ran it. He ran it from a clipboard, the same kind as the one on the brake, and the entry fee was due by a date, and the

date had passed, and Dale had not paid, and was explaining why, and Tony was listening to the explanation the way the safety officer read procedures, all the way to the end, without interrupting.

"So you're out," said Tony, when Dale had finished.

"I'm not out. I'm late."

"Late is out," said Tony. "It's on the sheet."

"Who wrote the sheet?"

"I wrote the sheet," said Tony, "in nineteen ninety-six," and turned a page on his clipboard, and that was the end of it, and Dale was out, and would, everyone at the table understood, be let back in by Monday.

Ricky ate his sandwich. His right hand had a small blister on the side of the first finger from the drill. He looked at it now and then.

"Rivets?" said the moustache, in a gap.

"Most of them."

"Other side this afternoon."

"Yeah."

The moustache ate a chip.

"Next time you set them," he said, "set them low."

It was not an apology and it was not a joke. He said it the way he said *two on, skip*. Ricky said okay.

He finished his sandwich and went and stood at the correct distance from the long table.

"One in seven," he said. "Bodies with liners. That get interference."

Walt looked up from his paper. "Who told you that?"

“The estimator.”

Walt considered this for a moment, and went back to the paper.

“Then it’s one in seven,” he said.

* * *

The other side took until two.

Then there were the low-profile rivets, which Len had brought up in a paper bag from Harjit. They were the same as the old ones except that their heads were flatter, like a coin instead of a button. Ricky set them in the holes he had drilled out, one by one, in the shelf path, with the air gun, not pressing, letting it pull, and they set flat and low, barely standing off the liner, so that when he ran his thumb along a row of them his thumb hardly bumped.

At half past two the three of them lifted the shelving unit and stood it at the front of the gap, square, and the moustache said “Go,” and they pushed.

It went in one inch, and two, and three, and Ricky found that he had stopped breathing somewhere around the second inch and did not start again until it went past the third.

It went in.

It went past the three inches where it had stopped. It went past the second row of rivets, and the third, the low ones, sliding along them with a faint, even whisper of aluminum over aluminum. It went all the way back to the stops at the rear of the towers and touched them, softly, and stopped there, where it was supposed to stop, square, level, with a sixteenth or so

on each side that you could see if you knelt down and looked along the gap, and could not see if you didn't.

"There you go," said the moustache.

He ran the bolts through the side plates into the towers himself. Ricky held the nuts on the other side, reaching into the tower compartments through the doors, one hand in each, like a man playing a very large piano. The bolts went in, and snugged up, and the shelving unit was part of the body.

The moustache got down off the bed and looked at it from the floor. Then he got the drawing off the cart and looked at it, the two numbers in blue and the fab lead's box in the margin.

"Drawing's right," he said, not unhappily. He folded it up.

* * *

At three the hose-reel body went.

Ricky did not see it go out of paint. He saw it in shipping, in front of the middle door, where the water-utility truck had stood on the first day: white, glossy, finished, its compartment doors on and its handles on, a decal on the front upper corner with the name of the municipality and a little blue drop. The customer's name was on the curbside panel in vinyl, in letters two feet high.

A man from the municipality was walking around it with a clipboard. He was in a work shirt with the district's crest on it, and he walked slowly, the way people walk around a thing they have been waiting for, and opened every door, and closed every door, and at the tall curbside compartment near the front he opened the door and reached in and took hold of the crank

on the hose reel and turned it, a few turns, and the reel went round, smoothly, on its bracket, and he let go of it and nodded and closed the door.

He did not look at the curbside panel, except to read his own name on it.

He signed something on the clipboard that the fab lead was holding out, and got in the cab, and started it, and the big door rolled up, and the body went out into the yard, and turned, and the curbside panel went past the door in one long white flash, and was gone.

Ricky went back to bay three and picked up the broom.

“That the hose reel?” said Len, from the ladder, who had watched it go too.

“Yeah.”

“Crank turn?”

“Yeah.”

“Good,” said Len, and that was all he said about it.

* * *

At twenty past three the fab lead came through with the traveller and stopped at the body, and wrote in the box for actual hours. Ricky, sweeping, could see it from where he was. He could see the number. It was a lot bigger than the one in the box for estimated hours.

Next to it, in the margin, the fab lead wrote a single word, which Ricky could also see from where he was.

Interference.

* * *

The jar of rivet heads was still on the cart when the horn went. Ricky looked at it on his way out. It was about two-thirds full now, stems and heads together, little snapped nails and little aluminum hats, and it would go in the scrap bin at the end of the week with everything else.

In the car, reaching into his shirt pocket for his keys, he found something small and hard.

He took it out. It was a rivet head. It was the crooked one, the first one, the one he'd set leaning on Monday, which the moustache had drilled off and put in his hand, and which he had apparently put in his pocket, without thinking, and forgotten.

He looked at it. It was very small. It was tilted where the rivet had gone in at an angle, a little lopsided hat.

He put it in the cupholder, where the change went, and drove home.

THURSDAY

BAY FOUR HAD the same body in it as bay three.

Not the same body. The same job, the next one: another utility body for the power company, towers down both sides, liners already on the inside faces where the towers looked across the gap at each other. Len had riveted them on Monday, after the horn. They had rows of small domed heads, one every few inches, standing up off the liner.

Ricky looked at them for a while.

“Do we pull them?” he said.

“Fab lead says wait for the drawing,” said the moustache. He was taking his lunch out of his cooler and putting it on the cart. “Design’s doing a new one. Three-sixteenths. It comes down, we do what it says.”

“When does it come down?”

The moustache looked toward the office end of the shop, the way you’d look toward the weather.

“When it comes down,” he said.

* * *

While they waited for the shelving unit, the moustache had him hang a door.

It was a tall compartment door for the curbside tower, the same size as the one the man in the cut-off sleeves had carried over on Monday and hung in four minutes, and it came over from fab on a cart with its piano hinge already on and its gasket already in, and the moustache stood it against the tower and said, "Go on."

Ricky measured the opening. Top, middle, bottom, both sides. He measured the door. He marked the hinge line on the tower with the silver marker, from the top, every mark from the same end. He got the moustache to hold the door in the opening, and he put the first screw through the hinge, and drove it, and the second, and went down the hinge, screw, screw, screw, and at the bottom he said "Okay," and the moustache let go.

The door stayed.

Ricky swung it shut. It closed. It did not seat itself the last quarter inch. It stopped a quarter inch short, against something, at the top corner on the handle side, and stayed there, not quite closed, like a door in a house that has settled.

He opened it and looked at the gap. It was an eighth at the bottom and nothing at the top.

"Racked," said the moustache. "You hung it square to the hinge. The opening's not square to the hinge. It never is. Shim the top hinge screw."

They shimmed the top hinge screw. They backed the screw out and slipped a thin washer behind the hinge leaf and ran it in again, and Ricky swung the door, and it closed, and did not seat, and the gap was an eighth at the top now and nothing at the bottom.

“Too much,” said the moustache.

They took the washer out and put a thinner one in. The door closed, and nearly seated. They took that one out and put in a thinner one still, a sliver of shim stock the moustache cut off a roll with snips, and the door closed, and the last quarter inch pulled it in, the small sound, and it seated.

Ricky opened it and ran his thumbnail round the gap. It fit, all the way round. Just.

He looked at the clock over the brake, which you could see from bay four if you leaned. It had taken them forty minutes.

“That’s a door,” said the moustache, and put the snips back in his pocket.

Len, who had come down off his stepladder at some point to watch, looked at the door, and at the clock, and at the moustache.

“Took Hand four,” he said.

“Hand’s not hanging his first door,” said the moustache.

Len considered this, and found it fair, and went back up his ladder.

* * *

The shelving unit for bay four had been built the afternoon before, at Dale’s table, from a kit.

It came over on its cart at half past eight with Dale pushing it. It was the same as the other one, four shelves with a lip on each and a side plate on each end, welded at every joint. Dale parked it beside the body and stood back and looked at it with the satisfaction of a man who has built a thing in a single afternoon that the estimator gave him a day for.

"Kit came up from receiving pre-cut," Dale said. "Everything on one cart with the job number on it. Laid it out, tacked it, ran it. Didn't even have to go to the saw."

"Did you measure it?" said Ricky.

Dale looked at him the way the moustache had looked at him when he'd said the eighth of an inch wasn't much.

"It came cut," said Dale. "Off the cut list."

The moustache got up on the bed of the body and looked at the rivets on the liner, and at the shelving unit on its cart, and at the drawing, which was the same drawing as bay three's, Revision D, with 48 on the shelf in blue and no pencil note.

"Well," he said. "Let's see how bad."

* * *

They lifted it up, the three of them, the moustache and Ricky and Dale, because Len was on a stepladder in bay three doing the top seam of the roof and wouldn't come down. They stood it at the front of the gap between the towers, square, facing in.

"Go," said the moustache.

They pushed.

It went in one inch, and two, and three, and Ricky held his breath at three, and it went past three, and his hands, which

had been braced for it to stop, went on with it, so that for a second he was leaning on nothing and had to catch himself on the side plate. It went past the second row of rivets. It went past the third. It slid in along the domed heads without touching them, with a little rattle, the sound of something that had room, and went all the way to the stops at the back of the towers, and stopped there, and when the moustache let go of his end it moved, a little, sideways, and came to rest against one tower with a soft knock.

The moustache pushed it sideways the other way. It moved. It knocked softly against the other tower. There was a gap on the first side now that you could see from the floor without kneeling down.

“Huh,” said Dale.

* * *

Ricky measured it.

Nobody asked him to. He borrowed Len's tape, calling up to the stepladder in bay three, and Len dropped it down without looking, and Ricky caught it. He climbed up on the bed and hooked it on one side plate of the shelving unit and ran it across the front to the other.

Forty-seven and three-quarters.

He did the top. Forty-seven and three-quarters. At the bottom. The same.

“It's short,” he said.

The moustache took the tape and did it himself, top, middle, bottom.

"It's short," he agreed.

"It came off the cut list," said Dale.

"Where's the cut list?"

Dale went and got it off his table. It was a sheet with a column of parts and a column of lengths, handwritten, in the fab lead's pen, photocopied, with a job number at the top. He put his finger on a line: the shelf crosspieces, the long members that ran between the two side plates and set the width of the unit.

47 5/8, it said. Or it said 47 3/8. The fab lead's five had a flat top on it, and the photocopier had not been kind to the flat top, so that what was left of the five curled round like a three, and if you held the sheet one way it was one number and if you held it another way it was the other.

"That's a five-eighths," said the moustache.

"That's a three-eighths," said Dale.

They both looked at it.

"Go ask receiving," said the moustache, to Ricky. "Take the list."

* * *

Receiving was loud. The radio above the door was playing something with a lot of guitar in it, and the roll-up door was open to the yard and the light was coming in low and hard across the floor, and the forklift was parked in the middle of the floor at an angle that did not seem to have been chosen. The man in the backwards cap was at the drop rack, pulling a length of tube out of it without looking, and singing.

He saw Ricky. He stopped singing, though the radio did not.
 “What’ve you got?”

Ricky held out the cut list with his finger on the line.

The man in the backwards cap took it. He looked at the line. He turned the sheet sideways, and then the other way, and then held it up to the light from the door, so that the sun came through the paper from behind.

“Looks like a three,” he said.

“It’s a five. The top’s missing.”

The man looked at it again, with the sun behind it.

“Looks like a three with a hat on,” he said.

He handed it back. Then, as Ricky was turning to go, he said, not looking up from the drop rack, where he had gone back to pulling out the length of tube:

“It fit?”

Ricky stopped.

“Yes.”

“Then it’s a three,” said the man in the backwards cap, and put the tube across two sawhorses, and slapped it once, and started singing again, slightly behind the radio.

* * *

On the way back he went past the brake. Tony was between angles, with his glasses on his forehead, and Ricky, without quite deciding to, held out the cut list with his finger on the line.

Tony pulled his glasses down and looked at it for about as long as it takes to read a clock.

"Five," he said.

"How do you know?"

"His fives," said Tony, and pushed his glasses back up, and picked up the next strip.

When Ricky got back to bay four, the moustache and Dale and Len were all standing at the front of the body, looking at the shelving unit in the gap. Len had come down off his stepladder after all. They were standing the way men stand around a car that has made a noise.

"Well?" said the moustache.

"He says it's a three."

"It's a five," said Dale.

"He says it fit, so it's a three."

Nobody said anything for a while.

"Do we tell him?" said Dale finally. He meant the fab lead.

"Tell him what," said the moustache.

"That it's short."

"It's in."

"It's a quarter short."

"It's in," said the moustache. He said it the way he said *drawing's right*.

"Tell him it fits," said Len.

"It doesn't fit," said Dale. "It rattles."

"It's in," said the moustache.

Ricky looked at the three of them, and at the shelving unit, and at the drawing on the cart, which said 48.

"The drawing says forty-eight," he said.

The moustache looked at the drawing.

“Drawing’s right,” he said. He considered this for a moment, and then, after a pause, in the voice of a man adding a footnote: “Shelf’s wrong. Shelf’s in.”

* * *

In the end nobody decided.

Nobody told the fab lead and nobody decided not to tell him. The moustache got a handful of washers from Harjit, big flat ones, and he and Ricky stacked them behind the side plates on each side, between the plate and the liner, in the places where the bolts would go through, until the gap was taken up and the shelving unit sat square in the middle of the opening and didn’t move. Two washers, then three, then two and a thin one. The moustache ran the bolts through the side plates and the washers and the liners and the towers. Ricky held the nuts from inside the compartments, one hand in each, like before.

When it was done, the shelving unit was in, and square, and bolted, and did not rattle. You could see the washers if you knelt down and looked along the gap. You could not see them if you didn’t.

The moustache got down and looked at it from the floor.

“There you go,” he said.

Dale was already walking back to fab. He had a frame to do, and the look of a man who would, from now on, measure things that came off cut lists, at least for a week or two.

* * *

At lunch the window table did not bring it up. Dale told a story about his brother-in-law's boat, which had a new problem, and the boat was agreed to be cursed, and a Mark said the brother-in-law should sell it, and Dale said he'd been saying that for three years.

"He won't sell it," said the other Mark. "Nobody'll buy it. It's a known boat."

"It's not a known boat."

"Everybody on the lake knows that boat," said the Mark. "People move their boats when that boat comes in."

Dale considered defending the boat, and could not find a way in, and ate his sandwich instead.

Ricky ate his too. He thought about a three with a hat on.

When he'd finished, he went and stood at the correct distance from the long table. Walt looked up.

"Cut lists," said Ricky. "Are they ever wrong?"

Walt thought about it.

"The list's never wrong," he said. "The reading's wrong." He went back to his paper. "Measure what comes."

Walt's pencil went down the classifieds again. It stopped at the same ad it had stopped at on Monday. It stayed there a while. Then it went on.

* * *

In the afternoon the new drawing came down.

The fab lead brought it himself, at two, rolled in a tube under his arm. He unrolled it on the cart in bay three, where the first shelving unit was already bolted in, and then walked over to bay four with it.

It was Revision E. It had the opening where it had always been, and the shelving unit at forty-seven and seven-eighths, and a note in the corner in small capitals that said *CLEARANCE 3/16 MIN WHERE LINER RIVETED — SEE STD.*

The fab lead looked at the drawing. Then he looked up at bay four, at the shelving unit in the gap, in, square, bolted.

“That went in?”

“Went in,” said the moustache.

“You didn’t pull the rivets?”

“No.”

The fab lead looked at the domed rivets, still there. He looked at the shelving unit, and at the drawing in his hand, and at the moustache.

The moustache looked back at him with a perfectly ordinary face.

The fab lead did not get his tape out. He stood at the shelving unit a long moment more, with the expression of a man who has been given a gift in a box he’s not sure he wants to open. Then he rolled the drawing back up.

“Good,” he said, and wrote something on the traveller, and went.

Dale, at his table in fab, was measuring a frame. He had his tape out. He was measuring it from one end, and then from the other end, and then from the first end again.

At three he came over to bay four with the tape still in his hand.

“Rook,” he said. “Come measure this.”

Ricky went over to fab with him. Dale’s frame was on his table, a small one, plain, nearly done. Dale handed him the drawing and the tape.

“Longsills,” said Dale. “Overall. Tell me what it says.”

Ricky hooked the tape on the end of the rail and walked it to the other end and read it, and read the drawing, and they were the same. He did the other rail. The same.

“It’s right,” he said.

Dale looked at the frame, and at the drawing, and at Ricky, and nodded slowly.

“Good,” he said. “Thanks.”

He took his tape back and measured the first rail again himself, from the other end.

* * *

When the horn went, Ricky walked out past receiving.

The radio was still going. The forklift was parked by the door. The drop rack stood against the wall with its lengths on end, all of them with numbers on them in marker, some crossed out and written in again, and the coffee cup on top of the length of tube.

The man in the backwards cap was gone. On the bench by the door, under a roll of tape, there was a stack of cut lists for tomorrow, photocopied, with the fab lead’s handwriting on them. Ricky did not read them. He thought about it, and did not.

FRIDAY

THE PAY STUBS came out at ten.

Ricky did not know this. He found out because at ten o'clock, without anybody announcing anything, the floor began to empty toward the office end in ones and twos, men wiping their hands on their pants and walking up the aisle at a pace that was not quite a hurry, and then coming back a few minutes later with small white envelopes, opening them as they walked, reading, folding them into shirt pockets.

"Stubs," said the moustache, who had not moved. "Go on."

"You're not going?"

"I'll get mine at lunch. It's not going anywhere." He looked at Ricky. "Yours isn't either. Go on anyway."

* * *

There was a short line at the sliding window. Dale was in it, and one of the Marks, and Tony, who was reading his stub already, with his glasses down on his nose, as he walked away. When Ricky got to the front, the window was open, and the woman behind it was looking at a tray of envelopes arranged in a row,

alphabetically, and without looking up at him she took one out of the row and held it through the window.

He took it.

It had his name on it, in capitals, printed by a machine, through the little plastic window in the envelope. The same way it had been on the card around his neck. The same way he had written it himself on the tag of his lock.

He opened it. It was a sheet folded in three, with columns on it: hours, rate, gross, a row of deductions, net. The hours were in a column by day. Monday of the first week. Tuesday. Wednesday, SWPs, all day, counted. Thursday. Friday. And then the next week, and the Friday of the next week, the drill day, which had counted exactly the same as the others.

He considered the net.

"The deposit went through this morning," said the woman. "Check the hours against your card. If anything's wrong, bring it back today."

He checked. He counted down the column. They were right.

"They're right."

"Tool allowance is after probation," she said. "Keep your receipts. They come to me."

"Okay."

She was already looking past him at the next person in line, who was Harjit, with an orange. Ricky stepped aside. The window stayed open for Harjit, and she took the next envelope out of the row, and held it through.

Down the hallway, Dale was standing against the wall with his stub open, reading it with the particular attention of a man looking for something to be angry about.

“Look at that,” he said, to Tony, who was passing. He held it out. “Look what they take.”

Tony did not look at it. Tony had his own stub in his hand, folded.

“Every two weeks,” said Tony, “for as long as I’ve had a stub. It’s never once been less.” He put his stub in his shirt pocket and buttoned the pocket. “I stopped reading that part in ninety-two.”

“Titan wasn’t here in ninety-two.”

“The part was,” said Tony, and went back to the brake.

Ricky walked back down the aisle with his stub, reading it, the way everyone else had. At the brake Tony looked up at him, and at the envelope, and back down at his work, and started counting again from wherever he had left off.

* * *

“All good?” said the moustache.

“Yeah.”

“Hours right?”

“Yeah.”

“Check them every time,” said the moustache. “Every time. One time they won’t be.” He took the stub out of Ricky’s hand without asking and looked at it, not at the number, at the hours column, and ran his finger down it, and handed it back. “They’re right.”

“Did you get yours?”

“Lunch.” The moustache shrugged. “I know what it says.”

“You said check them every time.”

“I’ll check the hours,” said the moustache. “I know what it says.”

Ricky folded it and put it in his shirt pocket.

“Monday,” said the moustache. “Tape.”

* * *

They were in bay four, finishing the second hydro body. Before the stubs, the moustache had shown him the torque wrench, a long one with a dial on it and a click, and they had gone round every bolt through every side plate and partition and set each one until the wrench clicked, and Ricky had learned that a click you could feel in your wrist was a different thing from a click you could hear, and that you went by the one in your wrist. After the stubs, it was the doors, and the hinges, and the hardware on the doors, and the partitions in the streetside tower. Ricky set rivets. He set them all low now. He set them low where the shelving unit went, which was done, and low where the partitions went, and low along the top of the liner, where nothing was ever going to slide past them at all.

The moustache watched him set a row of them.

“Those don’t need to be low,” he said.

“Low’s fine.”

The moustache considered this.

“Low’s fine,” he agreed.

Len, on his stepladder, had got as far as the second body's roof seam, and he ran it in one pass with his finger in the soapy water, and did not go back. Ricky watched him do it. Then Len handed him the gun without being asked and pointed at the curbside seam, and Ricky ran it. It was a little thick in the middle, and he dipped his finger and ran it along, one pass, and at the end his finger wanted very badly to go back, and he did not let it.

Len looked at it from below.

"Well," he said, and took the gun back.

* * *

At lunch the window table was half empty.

It was payday, and on payday, it emerged, a certain number of people went out: to the taco truck that parked on the frontage road on Fridays, or to the pub by the highway for a burger, or home, in one case, because it was close. The moustache stayed.

At five past twelve the moustache took a twenty out of his wallet and held it out to Ricky.

"Taco truck," he said. "Frontage road. Four of the regular. Tell him they're for twelve, he'll know."

"What's the regular?"

"Tell him they're for twelve."

Dale, going past, put a ten on top of the twenty. "Two for me. No onions. And one for Walt." He looked at the long table. "Walt gets the regular."

Walt did not look up. He did not say no.

The taco truck was parked on the gravel shoulder of the frontage road, a quarter mile along, with a line of five men in work shirts from three different companies in front of it and a hand-painted sign on the side with a picture of a taco that had been painted by someone who had heard tacos described. Ricky stood in the line. When he got to the window, the man inside, who had a bandanna and forearms like Walt's, looked down at him.

"Four regular for twelve," said Ricky. "Two no onions. One regular for Walt."

The man looked at him for a moment.

"Titan?"

"Yes."

"Table twelve," the man said, not asking, and began to make things.

He did not ask what the regular was. He did not ask who Walt was. Ricky stood at the window and watched him make them, fast, without looking at anything, and wrap them in foil, and write *12* on some of the foil and *NO ON* on two, and on the last one, in marker, a single *W*.

Ricky carried the bag back along the shoulder of the frontage road in the sun with the foil hot through the paper.

In the lunchroom he gave the moustache his change and his tacos, and Dale his, and then stood at the correct distance from the long table and held out the one with the *W* on it.

Walt took the bag without comment and set it next to his lunchbox, unopened.

He had the paper folded to the classifieds. His pencil was going down them the way it had on Monday and on Thursday. It stopped at the ad it always stopped at.

It stayed there.

Then Walt turned the pencil around in his fingers, and put the point to the paper, and drew a small, neat circle around the ad.

He looked at the circle for a moment. Then he folded the paper, with the circle inside it, and put it in his lunchbox, and opened the bag from the taco truck.

Nobody at the window table said anything. Nobody at the long table said anything. Ricky, who had been watching, looked at the moustache, and the moustache was looking at Walt too, and then looked away, at his own sandwich, and ate a chip.

* * *

After lunch there was one door left on bay four, the last street-side compartment, and the moustache pointed at it and went to get the partitions, and did not stay to watch.

Ricky measured the opening. He measured the door. He marked the hinge line from the top. He held the door in the opening with his knee and one hand, which was harder than having someone hold it, and put the first screw through the hinge, and drove it, and went down the hinge, screw, screw, screw.

He swung it shut. It stopped a hair short, at the top corner on the handle side.

He opened it and looked at the gap, and backed out the top hinge screw, and cut a sliver of shim stock off the moustache's roll with the moustache's snips, and slid it behind the hinge leaf, and ran the screw in again.

He swung it shut. The last quarter inch pulled it in, the small sound, and it seated.

He ran his thumbnail round the gap. It went round without catching.

He leaned to see the clock over the brake. Twenty minutes.

When the moustache came back with the partitions he opened the door, and closed it, and opened it again, and looked at the shim behind the top hinge, and closed it.

"Partitions," he said.

* * *

In the afternoon, coupons.

The moustache set it up without saying why. He cut six pieces of scrap on the saw himself and laid them on the table in pairs and pointed at them, and went back to bay four, and left Ricky to it.

Ricky brushed them and wiped them. He set the machine. He tacked both ends and the middle, and ran them, stitch by stitch, two on, skip, two on, and let the first inch wet in every time, and on the last one he ran it solid, end to end, just to see, holding the speed steady and letting the puddle lead.

He flipped up his helmet and looked at them. He got down and looked along them from the side. The edges went down

into the metal all the way along, flat and wet, from the first inch to the last.

He took them over to the vise, one at a time, and hit them.

They bent. All three bent at the seam and did not crack. He bent the solid one farther than the others, over itself, until it was a U, and it did not crack.

He took them out of the vise and looked at them.

The moustache came back from bay four at twenty to three for something off the table. He saw the bent coupons lying there. He picked up the solid one, the U, and turned it over, and looked at the outside of the bend, where the metal had stretched, for cracks. There were no cracks. He looked at it for about as long as Tony had looked at the first angle.

He dropped it in the scrap bin with the others.

He did not say anything, and Ricky did not wait for him to. Ricky had already turned back to the table, and was cutting the next pair.

* * *

At quarter past three, everybody swept. It had happened the Friday before and the Friday before that, and Ricky had his broom out from behind the table before the first grinder stopped.

He swept bay four. He swept around the body and under it and along the stepladders.

The fab lead came through with his clipboard while everybody was sweeping, and stopped at bay three, and looked at the shelving unit there, and then walked over to bay four and

looked at the one there, and stood looking from one to the other, the two bodies side by side.

Then he wrote something down and went.

* * *

In the lot the tailgates were down.

It was hot, and everybody had been paid, and the talk was loud and went in several directions at once. The hill, still. A different hill, farther away, which had been closed and was now open again. Somebody's new carburetor, which was the wrong carburetor, or the right one set up wrong. Whose truck was taking which bikes, and where to meet, and when, and whether "when" meant six or meant the kind of six that was really seven.

Ricky stood by the tailgate of the Marks' truck, because it was on his way, and listened.

He listened to the directions to the new hill, which involved a gravel road, and a gate that was sometimes open, and a turn by a burnt-out barn that one of the Marks said was gone now and the other Mark said was still there.

"It's gone," said the first Mark. "They knocked it down in the spring."

"I drove past it in June."

"You drove past where it was."

"I drove past a barn."

"You drove past a different barn."

"There's only one barn."

"There's two barns," said Dale, from the next tailgate, "and neither of them's burnt," and everyone turned on Dale, who

had not been up there in four years, and the barn was not resolved, and Ricky decided that if he ever went, he would go with somebody who knew which barn.

He listened to a long explanation of jetting, which was about the carburetor and the altitude and the air, and he found, somewhat to his surprise, that he mostly followed it.

Nobody asked him whether he rode.

Then the Marks got in their truck, and a few other trucks started, and the row began to empty, and Ricky walked on to his car at the end by the fence.

The moustache's Tacoma went past, slow, and stopped beside him with the window down.

"Tape," said the moustache. "Monday. Twenty-five foot. Not the thirty."

"Why not the thirty?"

"Too heavy on your belt. You'll hate it by October." He thought. "Get one with a fat blade. It'll stand out farther before it folds." He put the truck in gear. "And a square. Small one. Speed square. Not the big one."

"Okay."

"Don't let them sell you the kit," said the moustache, and drove off, and said something else out the window as he went that Ricky did not catch, and did not need to.

* * *

He sat in his car with the door open. He took out his phone. DON'T GO was at the top of his notes, and he opened it, and scrolled down past the wrench and the paint and the steam,

and deleted *discs expire*. Then he looked at his bank account. The deposit was there. It was the number from the stub, exactly, sitting at the top of a list of other, smaller numbers, most of them going the other way.

He sat looking at it.

Then he put the phone away and shut the door and drove out through the gate.

On the highway, near the exit for home, he passed the plaza where the Mark's was, the store where he'd bought his boots. There was a big sign in the window about work pants. He could see the tool aisle from the highway, or thought he could.

He did not stop. It was Friday. The moustache had said Monday.

The lopsided rivet head rattled a little in the cupholder with the change as he took the off-ramp, and he reached over without looking and put a finger on it until it stopped.

FOUR

MONDAY

THE HARDWARE STORE on the highway opened at six, and Ricky was in the parking lot at five to, with the engine off, watching a man in an orange apron unlock the doors from the inside.

He had not planned to be first. He had planned to be early, and it had turned out that early was first, on a Monday in late August, at a big-box store at six in the morning. The only other car in the lot was a pickup with a ladder rack and a contractor's name on the door, and the man in it was asleep with his hat over his face.

The aisle for tape measures had more tape measures in it than there were people at Titan, hanging on hooks by length and brand and colour, with little cards that said things like *MAX STANDOUT* and *PRO*.

Twenty-five foot. Not the thirty. Fat blade.

He found the twenty-fives. He took one down and pulled the blade out and held it level in the air, the way he'd seen the moustache do on a job without thinking about it, to see how far it would stand out before it folded. It folded at about seven feet.

He hung it back up and took down the one next to it, which had a wider blade, yellow, and pulled it out, and held it level. It went past eight, wobbling. It folded at about ten.

He kept that one.

A square. Small one. Speed square. The speed squares were in the next aisle over, aluminum, triangular, with numbers stamped around the edges that he mostly knew what to do with. He took one. Pliers: a pair of slip-joints with red handles. A set of combination wrenches, open on one end and box on the other, in a little canvas roll, imperial, because the moustache had said everything at Titan was imperial except the things that weren't, and he could borrow those.

He was standing at the end of the aisle with his arms full, working out whether he needed a bag, when the man in the orange apron found him.

"Setting up?"

"Yes."

"You'll want to look at this." The man walked him to an end display and put his hand on a red plastic case the size of a small suitcase, with a clear lid, through which Ricky could see a great many tools, each in its own moulded slot, gleaming. "Starter kit. Hundred and twenty pieces. Everything you'll need your first year."

Ricky looked at it. There were sockets in every size. There was a tool he could not identify, and a level with a bubble in it the size of a pea.

It was beautiful.

"No," said Ricky. "Thanks. No kit."

The man in the orange apron seemed to have expected this answer from someone, just not from someone Ricky's age.

"Somebody tell you not to?"

"Yes."

The man nodded, slowly, as if acknowledging the authority of someone he had never met and did not need to.

"Fair enough," he said, and went back to his pallet.

At the till Ricky paid, and the machine printed him a receipt as long as his forearm, and he folded it in half, and in half again, and put it in his wallet behind his licence, where it would be safe until it went to the woman at the window, after probation, with the others.

* * *

He got to Titan at twenty to seven, and parked at the end by the fence, and walked up the row with his lunch in one hand and his new tape on his belt.

It was heavier on his belt than he had imagined. It pulled his pants down a little on one side. He kept hitching them up. By the time he got to the roll-up door at receiving he had hitched them up four times and had begun to understand, in a general way, why the moustache had said not the thirty.

The lot was talking about the hill. Somebody had gone up and somebody had come down, and a bike had come down separately, and there was a question about whether the bike was going to be fine, which several people were confident it was and the owner of the bike was not. Nobody asked Ricky if he'd gone. He hadn't.

Inside, he looked at the whiteboard, because he looked now.

Table twelve had *ASSY 4* in blue, crossed out, and after it, in the next square, a job number and the letters *BINS*. Further down the board, the row that said *CHWK FD* now had a date written after it, in red, underlined twice. There was still no table number next to it.

* * *

The moustache came in at five to seven and put his lunch on the corner of the table, and looked at the tape on Ricky's belt.

He didn't say anything about it. He reached for his own tape, the way he reached for it fifty times a day, and Ricky, standing beside him, reached for the moustache's tape too, out of three weeks of habit, and got his hand halfway there before he remembered, and stopped, and put his hand on his own.

The moustache watched him do it.

"Twenty-five?" he said.

"Twenty-five."

"Fat blade?"

"Fat blade."

"Pull it out."

Ricky pulled it out. The moustache pulled out his own beside it, and laid the two blades side by side along the edge of the table, hooked on the same corner, and looked along them. The two lines ran down the table next to each other, one old and grey and worn at the first foot where a thumb had rubbed the numbers off, and one bright yellow and new. At the far end of the table the moustache bent and looked at where they stopped.

“Same,” he said.

He let his own go. It rattled back into its case. Ricky let his go, and it came back fast, faster than he was ready for, and snapped against the hook, and stung his thumb.

“Don’t let it go,” said the moustache. “Walk it back. It’ll take your finger off one day.”

“Okay.”

“Keep your receipt.”

“I did.”

“Good.” The moustache picked up his lunch again and looked at the whiteboard, and at the square that said *BINS*. “Bins,” he said. “Outside joints. You’re running them.”

* * *

Bins were compartments.

That was all they were. They were the boxes that went inside the towers of a body, one per compartment, open at the front where the door would be, closed on the other five sides. They were built at a table in fab and then carried over to assembly and set into the towers and fastened, and the door went on the front, and the box behind the door was the bin. There were eight of them for the job on the whiteboard, stacked on a cart at the end of the sixth table, tacked together at every corner and nothing else, waiting.

The sixth table was the one next to the fifth.

The man in the cut-off sleeves was at the fifth table, with his back to the aisle, building bins of his own. He was running the corners of one of them as Ricky and the moustache came

up, and the blue light of his arc came and went on the curtain behind him.

“Back corners,” said the moustache. He pulled the first bin off the cart and stood it on the sixth table, open side down, so that its back was facing up at the ceiling. “These edges, where the back meets the sides. Outside of the box. Solid, not stitched. Down the corner, top to bottom.”

“Solid?”

“Bin’s small. Thin wall. It won’t pull like a frame.” He ran his gloved thumb down one of the corners, the one that faced up. “This side goes against the tower. Back of the compartment. When it’s in, you can’t see it from outside the body, and you can’t see it from inside the bin, because it’s on the outside of the bin.” He tapped the corner. “Somebody’d have to take the body apart.”

He set the machine on the blue cart, which had been wheeled over. He changed one number. He looked at Ricky.

“Let it wet in,” he said. “Don’t go fast at the ends. Fill your craters.”

“Fill my —”

“The end of the weld. When you stop. It leaves a dip. Hold it there a half second before you let go, so it fills.” He showed him with his hand in the air: a gun moving, stopping, holding. “Otherwise it cracks from the dip.”

“Okay.”

“I’m in bay four,” said the moustache. “Hinges.”

And he picked up his lunch, and walked away down the aisle toward assembly, and did not look back.

* * *

Ricky stood at the sixth table with the gun in his hand.

It was the first time since he'd arrived that nobody was standing next to him. There was a bin, open side down, eight of them, and a gun, and a table, and nobody.

He brushed the corner with the blue-tape brush until it went bright. He wiped it with acetone. He put his helmet down.

The world went dark green.

At the fifth table, a few feet away, the man in the cut-off sleeves' arc went out, and there was the small sound of him setting down his gun, and then of a clamp being loosened. Then his arc came on again.

Ricky struck his own.

The puddle came up dull on the cold corner and sat there, and he held it there, and it went shiny all at once, and the edges went flat, and he went. Down the corner, top to bottom, not fast, the puddle leading, the arc frying, the corner of the bin sliding past under the green glass like a road under a car. At the bottom he slowed, and stopped moving, and held it there a half second with the arc still going, and felt the dip fill, and let go.

He flipped the helmet up.

A grey line ran down the corner of the bin, top to bottom, rippled and even, and at the bottom it ended in a small, full, rounded cap, no dip, no crater.

He looked at it a while longer than he needed to. Then he looked around.

There was nobody there. The moustache was in bay four. The man in the cut-off sleeves was welding at the fifth table with his back to him. Dale, two tables down, was on the phone, which he was not supposed to be. Nobody had seen it.

He turned the bin a quarter turn on the table and did the next corner.

* * *

He did three bins in the morning.

It was not fast. Each bin had four back corners and he did every one of them the same way, brush and wipe and brush, helmet down, hold it till it wets, go, slow at the bottom, hold, fill, let go. After each one he flipped his helmet up and looked at it from the top and from the side, down low, the way the moustache looked at welds with the flashlight. Most of them looked like the first one. One of them, on the second bin, he ran a little fast at the top, and when he looked at it from the side the edges at the top sat up off the metal for half an inch, the way the stitch on the frame had.

He stood over it a long time.

Then he got the die grinder with the carbide burr off the moustache's shelf, and took the top of the weld out, down to clean metal, a short bright groove, and brushed it, and wiped it, and ran it again, and held it till it wet in, and this time the edges went flat.

* * *

Around ten, the man in the cut-off sleeves held out his hand.

He did it without turning around, the way he had held out the square to Ricky in the second week: one arm back, palm up, fingers open, waiting, while he looked at whatever he was looking at on the fifth table. He was fitting a bin. He had one side of it clamped and he was holding the other side in place with his other hand, and he needed something, and he had reached back for it.

There was nobody behind him at the fifth table. There was a rack of clamps, just out of his reach.

Ricky looked at the hand, and at the bin the man was holding, and at the side he had clamped and the side he hadn't, and at the rack.

He took a clamp off the rack, one of the short F-clamps with the pads on the jaws, the kind the moustache used for exactly this, a bin side against a bin back, and put it in the hand.

The hand closed on it.

The man in the cut-off sleeves put the clamp on the other side of the bin and tightened it, and let go of the bin, and it stood. He did not turn around. He did not say anything. He picked up his gun and his arc came on.

Ricky went back to the sixth table.

* * *

At lunch the window table noticed his tape.

"New tape," said one of the Marks.

"Yeah."

"What'd you get?"

"Twenty-five."

The Mark nodded.

“Fat blade?”

“Fat blade.”

“Good.”

“Thirty,” said Dale, from across the table, without looking up. “Should’ve got the thirty.”

“He doesn’t need the thirty.”

“The reach,” said Dale.

“You don’t use the reach. Nobody uses the reach. You like the weight. You like feeling like you’ve got something on your belt.”

“I like the reach,” said Dale, with dignity.

It went on from there. It went on about the reach, and then about blade width, and then about magnetic tips, which both Marks were against and Dale was for, and then about a particular tape one of the Marks had owned in about 2004 that had been, in his opinion, the best tape ever made, and had been discontinued, and whose discontinuation he had never gotten over. Ricky ate his sandwich and listened, and learned a good deal about tape measures that BCIT had not covered.

At the long table, Walt turned a page of his paper.

“Sixteen,” he said.

The window table went quiet.

“Sixteen foot?”

“Only ever needed sixteen,” said Walt, and turned another page.

Nobody at the window table knew what to say to this. The Mark with the discontinued tape opened his mouth, and closed it, and looked at Dale, and Dale looked at his sandwich.

“Sixteen,” said the Mark finally, to nobody, the way you’d repeat the name of a town you’d never heard of.

* * *

In the afternoon he did four more bins.

He did them faster than the morning ones, not because he was hurrying but because his hands had stopped asking him things. The brush. The wipe. The helmet. The hold. At some point in the afternoon he noticed that he had stopped flipping the helmet up after every corner to look around, and had started flipping it up only to look at the weld.

At the fifth table, the man in the cut-off sleeves built bins. He built them without measuring, as far as Ricky could see, fitting sides to backs and backs to bottoms and tacking and running, and they came off his table square, and went on the cart, and he started the next. He did not look at the sixth table. Ricky did not see him look at it once, all day.

At a quarter to three Ricky finished the seventh bin. There was one left.

* * *

The moustache came back from bay four at three.

He had a flashlight in his back pocket. He took it out and looked at the bins on the cart, the seven Ricky had done, stacked open side down with their backs up, and he picked up the first

one and turned it over and held the flashlight low beside the first corner, so that the beam ran along the weld, and bent, and looked.

He looked at every one.

It took him a while. He did not hurry. He went down every corner of every bin, the flashlight low, and Ricky stood a half step back with his helmet in his hands and did not say anything, and at the fifth table the arc came and went.

"That's good," said the moustache, at the first corner.

He went on.

"Good. That's good." At the bottom of one, he stopped, and touched it with his thumb. "Crater. See? You let go early." He showed him: a tiny dip at the very bottom of the weld, a little shadow. "Fill your craters."

"I thought I did."

"You did on the rest. You didn't on this one." He went on. "Good. Good."

At the second bin, at the corner Ricky had ground out and run again, he stopped for longer. He held the flashlight very low. He looked at the top of the weld, where the new metal met the old, where you could see, if you knew where to look, a faint change in the ripple.

"You ground this out."

"It was cold at the top."

The moustache looked at it a moment more.

"Yeah," he said. "It would've been." He moved the flashlight down. "That's good. That's a good fix."

He went on. He did all seven bins, every corner, and when he was done he put the flashlight back in his pocket and looked at the stack.

“These are good, Rook.”

Ricky didn’t say anything.

“I mean it. For your first time on your own, these are good. Better than mine were.” He picked up the last bin, the one Ricky hadn’t done yet, and set it on the table, open side down. “Do that one. Then sweep.”

He went back to bay four.

* * *

Ricky did the last bin. He filled every crater. He held every one a half second past shiny, and then another quarter second, just in case.

At quarter past three he swept. When the horn went, he hung his helmet on the hook under the sixth table and his gloves on top of it, and took his tape off his belt, because it had been pulling his pants down all day, and put it in his lunch bag.

The moustache was coming back up the aisle from assembly as Ricky was leaving. He was carrying his cooler and he stopped at the sixth table and put it down on the corner.

“You going?” said Ricky.

“In a minute,” said the moustache. “I’ll lock up the cart.”

Ricky went out through receiving. The radio was still playing. In the lot the tailgates were down, and the talk was about the bike, which had turned out to be fine, and its owner, who had not.

He sat in his car and took the tape out of his lunch bag and turned it over in his hands. It was very yellow. He pulled the blade out, a foot, two feet, and read it, and then walked it back into the case, slowly, with his thumb on the blade, the way he'd been told, until it clicked home.

He put it on the passenger seat, next to the receipt in his wallet, which was in his pocket, which was in the car.

The lopsided rivet head was in the cupholder with the change. He looked at it, and at the tape, and started the car, and drove home.

TUESDAY

THE BINS WERE on the cart at the end of the sixth table where he had left them, stacked two high, open sides down, backs up.

Ricky looked at them while he put his lunch away. He looked at them because they were his, and because they were going over to assembly this morning and after that he would not see the backs of them again.

They looked good. They looked better than he remembered.

He picked up the top one and turned it to the light and looked along the first corner, low, the way the moustache did. The weld ran down the corner grey and even, top to bottom, and at the bottom it finished in a small round cap. He had remembered the ripple being a bit uneven in the middle of this one, where he'd been thinking about something else. It wasn't. He looked at the second bin, at the corner he'd ground out and run again, where the moustache had held the flashlight low and seen the change in the ripple. He looked for the place where the new metal met the old. He couldn't find it. It was just a weld, top to bottom. On the one with the crater, the one the

moustache had shown him with his thumb, the bottom of the weld finished in a small full cap, like the others.

He must have remembered it worse than it was. That happened with things you did yourself; you remembered the part that went wrong, and forgot that you fixed it.

He put the bin back on the stack.

The moustache came in at five to seven and put his lunch on the corner of the sixth table and looked at the bins.

"Those go over this morning," he said. "Bay three. New body."

* * *

The new body in bay three was the third one for the power company.

It was the same as the other two, with towers down both sides, and liners on the inside faces where the towers looked across the gap at each other, and rows of rivets on the liners. The rivets in the front three feet of each liner had flat heads, like coins. Somebody had set them that way on purpose, because the drawing on the cart now said Revision E in the corner and had a note on it in small capitals, *CLEARANCE 3/16 MIN WHERE LINER RIVETED — SEE STD*, and under the note, in the same small pencil hand, a job number and a date.

"New drawing," said Ricky.

"New drawing," the moustache agreed.

The bins went in first. That was the order: bins, then partitions, then the shelving unit, then doors. The moustache and Len and Ricky carried them over from the cart one at a time

and slid them into the towers, each into its own opening, back first, and the back of each bin went in against the back wall of the tower and stopped there.

Ricky slid in the first one himself. It was one of his. He pushed it in until it touched, and he felt it touch, and then it was in, and the back corners with his welds on them were against the tower wall in the dark, and what he could see was the open front of the bin, clean and square, waiting for a door.

He slid in the second one. The same.

He did not stand there and look at them. He went and got the third.

* * *

The man in the cardigan came onto the floor mid-morning.

Ricky had not seen him out of Design before. It was odd, the way it is odd to see a teacher in a grocery store. He came through the steel door at the office end with a rolled drawing under one arm and a small notebook in the other hand, and he walked down the middle of the aisle, where he could be seen, not quickly, and people looked up as he went past, and some of them nodded, and he nodded back.

At the fifth table the man in the cut-off sleeves did not look up.

“Hand,” said the man in the cardigan, passing.

“Seeker,” said the man in the cut-off sleeves, to the bin in front of him.

The man in the cardigan came on down the shop and around paint and into assembly. He stopped at bay three, where the

new body was, and looked at the bins going in, and at the drawing on the cart, Revision E, and at his own pencil note under the capitals, and seemed satisfied with it.

Then he went to bay four.

* * *

The second body was nearly finished. The doors were on, and the hardware, and it was waiting for paint, and its shelving unit stood in the gap between its towers, square and bolted, where it had been since Thursday.

The man in the cardigan stood at the front of it and looked at the shelving unit for a while. Then he took a small flashlight out of his cardigan pocket, climbed up onto the bed of the body without any fuss, knelt down beside the shelving unit, and put his eye down low by the side plate, and shone the flashlight along the gap between the plate and the liner.

He looked for a long time.

Ricky, carrying a partition across from the cart in bay three, stopped where he was.

The moustache, fitting a partition in bay three, stopped too, and looked across.

The man in the cardigan got up off his knee. He opened his notebook and wrote something in it. Then he unrolled his drawing, which Ricky could now see was the drawing for bay four, Revision D, the old one, and laid it on the bed of the truck, and wrote something on that too, in pencil, small, down beside the shelving unit. Then he rolled it up again, and climbed down.

He walked over to bay three, to the moustache.

“Bay four,” he said. “The shelving unit. As built?”

The moustache looked at him.

“As built,” said the moustache.

The man in the cardigan nodded. He opened his notebook and wrote something else, and Ricky, who was standing near enough with the partition, could read it upside down, because the handwriting was so neat. It was a job number, and a line, and then: *s/u 47 3/4 as built (cut list, misread) — shimmed, washers 2 + 3, 2 + thin. Fits. Not per dwg.* And a date.

“Thank you,” said the man in the cardigan.

“You’re welcome,” said the moustache.

That was all. The man in the cardigan did not ask who had misread the cut list, or why nobody had told him, or why the fab lead had signed the traveller.

He turned to go, and saw Ricky with the partition.

He looked at him for a moment. Then he opened the notebook again and turned back several pages, to a page Ricky couldn’t see, and looked at something on it.

“The hose-reel bracket,” he said. “Curbside. You hung it.”

“Yes.”

“Did it fit?”

Ricky thought of the four silver crosses, one in the middle of each slot. He thought of the curbside panel going past the door in one long white flash.

“It fit,” he said. “Four holes, in the slots. It went right up.”

The man in the cardigan took out his pencil. He found a line in the notebook, near the bottom of the page, copied over from

the catalogue page, and Ricky could see it, upside down, in the small, even hand: *bracket not seen*.

He did not cross it out. He wrote under it, in the same hand: *fit per installer (verbal)*. And the date.

"Thank you," he said.

He closed the notebook, and put the pencil in his pocket, and went back up the shop the way he had come, down the middle of the aisle, where he could be seen, and through the steel door.

The moustache watched him go.

"He come down here much?" said Ricky.

"No," said the moustache, and held out his hand for the partition.

They fit it. Ricky held it and the moustache riveted it, and when it was in, Ricky said, "Does he write everything down?"

"Everything."

"Why?"

The moustache pulled the trigger. The stem flew into the jar.

"Ask him," he said, and reached for the next rivet.

* * *

The shelving unit for bay three came over from fab before lunch.

It had been built at the fifth table, the traveller said, to Revision E, forty-seven and seven-eighths. Nobody had measured it that Ricky saw. The moustache didn't measure it. Len didn't. Ricky thought about measuring it, and had his new tape on his

belt, and put his hand on it, and then took his hand off it, and helped lift.

They stood it at the front of the gap between the towers, square.

“Go,” said the moustache.

It went in. It went in one inch and two and three and past three, sliding along the flat low heads of the rivets with the faint even whisper of aluminum over aluminum, and it went all the way back to the stops, softly, and stopped, square in the middle of the opening, with a little room on each side that you could see if you knelt down, and not a rattle, and not a knock.

The moustache ran the bolts. Ricky held the nuts from inside the bins, one hand in each.

The fab lead came through a little later with his clipboard, and stopped at bay three, and looked at the shelving unit, in, square, bolted, and at the drawing on the cart, Revision E.

He did not sigh.

He did not do anything. He looked at it for a moment, and wrote something on his clipboard, and went on toward shipping.

“Drawing’s right,” said the moustache, to nobody.

Before the doors, there were the bolts.

The moustache handed him the torque wrench, the long one with the dial, and said, “Side plates. Partitions. All of them,” and went to get the doors himself, which he had never done before while Ricky was doing something.

Ricky went round the body alone. He set the wrench on each bolt and pulled, slowly, steadily, the way he’d been shown on

Friday, and waited for the click. He felt for it in his wrist. It came, and he stopped, and went to the next. Every bolt through every side plate of the shelving unit, and every partition, on both towers. He did not count them. When he had done the last, he went back to the first and did it again, because he could not remember whether he had felt the click on that one or only heard it.

He had felt it. The wrench clicked again, straight away, without turning.

The moustache came back with the first door on his shoulder and set it down. He took the wrench out of Ricky's hand and put it on two bolts, at random, one on each tower, and pulled. The wrench clicked on both without turning.

He handed it back.

"Doors," he said.

* * *

At lunch the window table was talking about Chilliwack.

"It's behind," said Dale. "Way behind. They moved the date."

"Earlier or later?"

"Earlier." Dale looked at his sandwich. "They've got an open house. At the fire hall. They want the truck there for the open house. Friday."

"This Friday?"

"This Friday."

There was a small, respectful silence at the window table, the kind that happens when people hear about a thing happening to other people that could just as easily have happened to them.

“What’s an open house?”

“Fire hall does it every year. Barbecue. Kids climb on the trucks. There’s a bouncy castle.” Dale looked around the table, as if someone might be responsible for the bouncy castle. “They want to park the new truck next to the bouncy castle.”

“So the kids can climb on it?”

“So the kids can climb on it,” said Dale, with the face of a man thinking about small handprints on a stripe that did not exist yet.

“Who’s on it?”

“Everybody who’s on it,” said Dale. “And whoever else he puts on it.”

Nobody looked at the back door. Nobody needed to.

At the long table Walt had the paper open to the sports. He turned a page, and then another, and did not stop at anything. The classifieds were not in it today. He did not seem to be looking for them.

* * *

In the afternoon, carrying the last door from the cart to bay three, Ricky went the long way, past bay one.

He had not been down to bay one before. It was at the far end of assembly, the biggest bay, with the biggest door, and in it there was a body so large he stopped walking.

It was the rescue body. It was on the back of a big red cab-and-chassis, a fire department red, deep and glossy, and the body itself was still bare aluminum, bright, and it was longer than anything Ricky had seen at Titan. It had compartments

down both sides, floor to roof, more than he could count at a glance, and a walk-in section at the back with a door and steps, and a light bar across the top that was not wired yet, with its wires hanging down in bundles like the roots of something that had been pulled up.

There were five people working on it. Ricky knew some of them. One of the Marks was inside a compartment with a drill. Sukh, whom Ricky mostly knew from the saw, was on a stepladder at the roof. The electrician in the green shirt was lying on his back under the rear step with a work light, and nobody from fab was talking to him.

"Rook," said the Mark, from inside the compartment, before Ricky could go on. "Hold this a sec."

He held out a bracket, one end of it, from the depths of the compartment, and Ricky put down his door against the bay wall and took the end of the bracket and held it where the Mark pointed, against the compartment wall, while the Mark put a bolt through the other end and ran a nut onto it by hand.

"Other end," said the Mark.

Ricky held the other end. The Mark ran the second bolt.

"Thanks," said the Mark, and took the bracket from him, and went on with the next thing, and did not say anything else, and Ricky picked up the door again.

Along the wall of the bay, on a long table, there were boxes. Dozens of them, cardboard, open, with things in them that were not Titan's: brackets for tools, mounts for air packs, a reel of hose, a stack of yellow plastic cases with the fire department's name stencilled on them, a chainsaw in a box. Hardware the

fire department had sent over, to go in the compartments. A sheet of paper on top of the pile, in a sleeve, with a list on it, and a lot of ticks, and a lot of spaces without ticks.

The fab lead was standing in the middle of the bay with his clipboard, looking at the list, not moving. He had the look of a man who has been standing still for a while because moving in any direction would mean choosing it.

Ricky went on, with the door, to bay three.

* * *

They hung the last doors on the third body at half past two. Ricky hung two of them himself, one with a shim and one without, and the moustache opened and closed both, and said nothing about either, and went on to the next.

At three the moustache stood back from the body and looked at it. The bins were in, and the partitions, and the shelving unit, and the doors. From the outside it was a row of doors down each side, brushed aluminum with stainless handles. You could not see a bin, or a back corner, or a weld.

“Paint Thursday,” the moustache said. “Ships next week.”

He checked the clock over the brake.

“Sweep,” he said. “Then go home. Tomorrow’s going to be a day.”

“What’s tomorrow?”

The moustache picked up his cooler.

“Tomorrow’s Wednesday,” he said.

* * *

When the horn went Ricky walked out the long way again, past bay one.

The rescue body was still there, in its big bay, with the lights on over it. Most of the people had gone. The electrician was still under the rear step. The fab lead was still standing in the middle of the bay, with his clipboard, looking at the list.

And the foreman was there. He was standing at the long table with the boxes on it, his back to the aisle, with his coffee, looking down at the boxes one by one, not touching them, the way he had looked at the whiteboard in the half-dark on that Wednesday morning in the second week.

He did not turn around.

WEDNESDAY

TABLE TWELVE HAD changed on the whiteboard.

Ricky saw it at twenty to seven, in the half-light, on his way in, because he looked now. The square after *BINS* had been wiped clean, and in it, in the foreman's blue, in small capitals, someone had written *CHWK FD*. Further down the board, the row that had said *CHWK FD* all month with nothing next to it now had a table number next to it. It was twelve.

He stood and looked at it.

He thought about it being a mistake. People made mistakes on whiteboards. He thought about it being something else, and started, without meaning to, to go through the list of things it might be for: the angle across the scrap bin, the cold stitch on the eighteen-footer, the hole in the curbside panel, the crater at the bottom of the bin that he had not filled. It was not a long list, but it was not a short one either, and he was most of the way through it when the lights came on over the shop, row by row, from the office end, and people began to come in.

* * *

The foreman came by at five to seven.

Ricky was at the sixth table, putting his lunch down. He did not hear him come. He turned around and the foreman was there, at talking distance, with his coffee.

“Good morning,” said the foreman.

He said it warmly, the way you’d say it to somebody you were glad to see. He had never said it that way before. He had said *morning*, flat, a hundred times, the way you’d say it to a wall you walked past every day. This was different, and it was not very different, and Ricky could not have said how.

“Good morning,” said Ricky.

The foreman looked past him at the moustache, who had just come up with his cooler.

“Bay one,” said the foreman.

The moustache put the cooler down.

“Both of us?”

The foreman was already walking away, toward assembly, with his coffee, nodding at people as he went. He did not look back, and he did not answer, and after a moment it was clear that walking away had been the answer.

Ricky looked at the moustache.

“Did I —” he said. “Is that because —”

“Get your tape,” said the moustache.

* * *

They walked down the shop together, past the brake, where Tony looked up and nodded at them and went on counting, and around paint, where the second hydro body was going in for primer, and on past bays three and four, and into bay one.

The rescue body was where it had been yesterday, on its red chassis, in the big bay with the big door, with the light bar across the top and the wires hanging down. It looked bigger than it had yesterday, because there was nobody standing in front of it for scale. There were people inside it, in compartments, on ladders, underneath. Somebody was drilling in the walk-in at the back. The electrician was under the rear step again, or still.

The fab lead was in the middle of the bay with his clipboard and the list. When he saw the moustache, something in his shoulders came down half an inch.

“Good,” he said. “Curbside. Two, three and four. Air-pack brackets in two, tool mounts and the spreader in three, hose reel in four. The hardware’s on the table, it’s all ticked, it’s in the boxes with the compartment numbers on them.” He checked the list. “Most of it’s ticked.” He looked at Ricky. “You’re with him.”

“Yes,” said Ricky.

“He’s with me,” said the moustache, at the same time.

The fab lead nodded at both of these, and went back to the list.

* * *

Ricky had never been inside a finished compartment before. Not one that was nearly finished, like this, with the shelves in and the doors on and the hardware going in.

Curbside two was the size of a small closet, like the one he had drilled through, but it was not bare. The walls were lined with a ribbed black rubber matting, glued down, that you could feel through your knees when you knelt on it. There was a light in the ceiling of it that came on when you opened the door, and it was on, a strip light that made everything very clear. There were two shelves, each with a lip, and each shelf had a row of holes along the back, evenly spaced, and a strip of aluminum track along the front edge with a slot in it, for things to slide into.

The air-pack brackets were in a box on the table, with C2 on it in marker. There were four of them. They were bent steel, powder-coated black, each one shaped to take the bottom of an air cylinder and hold it upright, with a strap that went round the top and a buckle that came undone with one pull. They came with bolts, and a paper template, and a sheet of instructions in three languages, none of which was quite right about anything.

"Template," said the moustache.

Ricky held the template on the back wall of the compartment, and the moustache marked the holes through it with the silver marker. Then they held the first bracket up against the marks. The holes in the bracket sat over the marks exactly.

"Drill," said the moustache.

Ricky drilled. There was a stop collar on the bit. He had put it there himself, from the little drawer of them in Len's toolbox, and set it a quarter inch past the flutes, and tightened it, and he felt the bit go through the back wall of the compartment and the drill jump forward a quarter inch and stop, and he did not walk around the truck to look at the other side, because he had put the stop on it, and because the other side of the back wall of curbside two was the back wall of streetside two.

He went round and looked anyway, from inside streetside two. It was fine.

* * *

The four brackets went up. Then the moustache took one of the air cylinders out of the box on the table, a big one, dark grey, surprisingly heavy, with the fire department's number stencilled on it, and set it in the first bracket and pulled the strap round it and buckled it, and then pulled the buckle, and the strap came undone with one pull and the cylinder was free.

"Somebody's going to do that in the dark," said the moustache. "In a hurry."

He buckled it again. He had Ricky do it. Ricky buckled it and pulled it. It came undone.

"Again."

Ricky did it again.

"With your eyes shut."

Ricky shut his eyes and found the buckle and pulled it, and the strap came free, and he opened his eyes and the cylinder was standing in its bracket, loose, ready to be lifted out.

“Good,” said the moustache, and put the cylinder back in the box, because the fire department would bring its own full ones on Friday, and these were for checking.

On the way to the table for the tool mounts, Ricky went past the rear step. The electrician’s legs were sticking out from under it, as they had been all morning, and a roll of black electrical tape had rolled out from under the step and across the floor of the bay and stopped against Ricky’s boot.

He picked it up.

The electrician’s hand came out from under the step, open, patting the floor where the tape had been.

Ricky looked at the hand. He looked back up the bay at the moustache, who was at curbside three with his back to him.

He put the tape in the hand. The hand closed on it and went back under the step.

Nobody said anything. From under the step, after a moment, came the sound of tape being torn off a roll.

* * *

The foreman came into bay one mid-morning.

He did not come to curbside three. He went to the middle of the bay, where the fab lead was with the list, and stood beside him, and looked at the list with him, not saying anything. Then he walked slowly down the length of the rescue body, along the curbside, past the open doors, looking into each compartment as he passed it, the way he glanced at tables walking down the aisle, only slower.

At curbside three he looked in.

Ricky was on his knees, tightening the first bolt on a tool mount. He was using his own wrench, out of the canvas roll, the box end, and he did not look up, because he was in the middle of it, and because he had learned by now that if he looked up the foreman would not be there.

When he had the bolt tight, he looked up.

The foreman was not there. He was at curbside four, looking in, and then he was at the tail, looking at the rear step, where the electrician's legs were sticking out, and then he was walking back up the streetside, looking into those.

* * *

At noon the foreman went out the back. Ricky did not see him go; he was inside curbside three with the moustache, holding a tool mount against the back wall. He heard a pickup start, somewhere outside, through the open bay door, and go out through the gate.

They ate standing up, on the bed of an empty flatbed trailer parked at the side of bay one, because the lunchroom was the length of the building away and the moustache said nobody on Chilliwick was walking the length of the building today. The fab lead ate there too, standing, reading his list with a sandwich in the other hand. So did the Mark from the compartment, and Sukh, down from his ladder, who ate an apple and said nothing at all.

"What's left?" said the moustache.

The fab lead turned the list over, and back.

“Everything with a box on the table that isn’t ticked.” He nodded at the table along the wall of the bay, with its dozens of boxes. “Most of it’s going in fine. Some of it’s not going in where it says.”

“Where’s it say?”

“Depends who you ask.” The fab lead put his finger on a line. “Their spec says the spreader goes in curbside three, on the upper shelf. Our drawing’s got the upper shelf in three for the air bags. Their spec’s right. It’s their spec. Our drawing’s right. It’s to their spec from six months ago.” He took a bite of his sandwich. “Since then they bought a new spreader. It’s bigger.”

“How much bigger?”

The fab lead chewed, and looked at the table with the boxes on it, where, at one end, there was a big yellow hard case with a handle on it and the fire department’s number stencilled on the lid.

“Bigger,” he said.

* * *

In the afternoon they got to the spreader.

It was in the yellow case, and the case was on the table, and the moustache opened it. Inside, in foam, there was a hydraulic spreader, the kind of tool the fire department would use to open a car. It was yellow and black and very heavy and shaped like the beak of an enormous bird, with two long jaws that came together at a point, and a handle, and a hose fitting at the back.

The moustache lifted it out with both hands and a small grunt, and carried it to curbside three, and held it up against the upper shelf.

It did not go. It went on the shelf, but the shelf was not deep enough for it; it overhung the lip by the length of a hand, and when the moustache let go of it with one hand it tipped forward, toward the door, toward whoever would be standing there opening the door, and he caught it.

“No,” said the moustache.

He held it there. The fab lead came over with the list, and looked, and did not say anything. The Mark came over from the next compartment. The air bags, in their bags, were sitting on the upper shelf already, where the drawing said, flat, square, fitting exactly.

“Lower shelf?” said the Mark.

“Lower shelf’s the hose,” said the fab lead. “Their spec.”

“Put the hose up.”

“Hose is heavy too.”

They stood there. The moustache was holding the spreader against the upper shelf, and it was heavy, and his arms were beginning to show it. The fab lead was looking at the list. Ricky, who had been handed nothing to hold for once, stood with his hands at his sides and looked at the spreader and the shelf and the air bags and the list, and could not see an answer in any of them.

The foreman came into bay one.

He came from the office end, walking at the pace he walked everywhere, with his coffee, and he came straight to curbside

three, as though he had been heading there all along, and stood at the door beside the fab lead, and looked in.

He looked at the spreader in the moustache's arms. He looked at the upper shelf, and at the air bags on it. He looked at the lower shelf, and at the slide-out tray below it, at the very bottom of the compartment, a flat aluminum tray on ball-bearing runners that pulled out into the doorway, with a lip round three sides, and nothing on it yet.

He put his coffee down on the sill of the next compartment.

Then he reached in past the moustache and took the spreader out of his arms, with both hands, and held it. He held it up at the height of the upper shelf, for a moment, the way the moustache had. Then he let it come down, slowly, all the way down, to the height of his own belt, and then lower, and bent, and pulled the tray out on its runners with one foot, and laid the spreader down on it, flat, jaws toward the door, handle toward his hand.

It fit. It lay on the tray with a hand's width to spare at each end.

He slid the tray back in with his foot. It went in, smoothly, on its ball bearings, and closed.

He pulled it out again with his foot, and it came out into the doorway with the spreader on it, jaws first, handle up.

"Tray," said the foreman.

He picked up his coffee and went.

* * *

Nobody said anything for a moment.

Then the fab lead looked at his list, and uncapped his pen, and started to write something in the margin next to the spreader line, and stopped with the pen on the paper, and looked at it, and did not write anything. He capped the pen again. He put a tick next to the line.

“Tray,” he said. “Hose goes on the lower shelf, per spec. Spreader on the tray. We’ll need a hold-down on the tray.”

“I’ll make one,” said the moustache. He was rubbing his forearms.

The Mark climbed back into his compartment. On the way, passing Sukh’s ladder, Ricky heard him say, “Tray,” and Sukh, at the top of the ladder, say “Huh,” and that was all anybody said about it. The fab lead went back to the middle of the bay. The moustache went to get a strip of flat bar for the hold-down.

Ricky stood at the door of curbside three and looked at the spreader on its tray.

He pulled the tray out. It came out into the doorway, heavy and smooth, and stopped at the end of its runners with the spreader on it, the handle toward him, at the height of his knees. He slid it back. He pulled it out again.

He slid it back in and closed the door.

* * *

The moustache made the hold-down out of a strip of flat bar, bent twice on Tony’s brake, with a rubber pad riveted to the inside of it and a quick-release pin through the end, and they fitted it to the tray at twenty past three. It went over the spreader

and pinned, and when you pulled the pin it came free with one pull.

“With your eyes shut,” said the moustache.

Ricky shut his eyes and found the pin and pulled it.

“Good,” said the moustache.

The horn went at half past three. Nobody in bay one stopped. The Mark kept drilling. Sukh stayed on his ladder. The electrician stayed under the step.

“Go home,” said the moustache.

“Everybody else is staying.”

“Everybody else is used to it.” The moustache looked at him. “Go home. Six tomorrow. Sleep.”

* * *

Ricky went out through the shipping door and around to the lot. The lot was fuller than it usually was at half past three. Most of the pickups were still there.

He sat in his car with the door open.

He went through the list again, the one he had started at the whiteboard that morning: the angle, the cold stitch, the hole, the crater. He went through it all the way, and it was still not a short list, and none of the things on it seemed like reasons to be put on the rescue body, and none of the things he could think of that were not on it seemed like reasons either.

He thought about the foreman taking the spreader out of the moustache’s arms, and holding it up at the shelf, and letting it come down.

He could not work out why the foreman had put them on it.

He got his phone out for the alarm. DON'T GO was still in there, near the top of his notes. He had not opened it in a while. He did not open it now.

He set the alarm for five.

THURSDAY

AT TEN TO six the lot was already half full.

Ricky had thought he would be early. He had set the alarm for five and been out of the door by twenty past, and he had driven along the highway in the grey light with nobody else on it, feeling early, and then he had turned in at the gate and the pickups were there, in their row, newest nearest the building, with their engines ticking as they cooled.

The roll-up door at receiving was open all the way. Inside, the lights were on over all of assembly, and in bay one there were already people, more than yesterday, and a sound he had not heard in the shop before, which was the sound of several things happening at once, fast, without anybody saying anything about it.

On the cart at the side of bay one there were two open boxes of doughnuts. There were four doughnuts left. By the time Ricky had got his coffee from the lunchroom and come back, there were two, and one of them had been bitten and put back.

“Fab lead,” said the Mark who had been in the compartment yesterday, with his mouth full, nodding at the boxes. “On rush days he brings doughnuts.”

“Does that help?”

The Mark looked at the boxes, and at the bitten one, and at the rescue body.

“It’s a doughnut,” he said, and went back to his compartment.

* * *

The foreman was in bay one at five past six.

Ricky was standing at the bay door with his coffee in one hand and the other hand resting on the tape on his belt, his weight on one foot, looking at the rescue body and trying to work out where to start. He heard nothing, and then the foreman was beside him, at talking distance, with his own coffee, looking at the rescue body too.

“Morning,” said the foreman.

“Morning.”

The foreman looked at the body a while longer. Then he looked at Ricky, briefly, from his boots to his coffee, and went on into the bay, and stood beside the fab lead at the list.

The moustache came up behind Ricky with his cooler.

“Grab handles,” he said. “Rear. Layout. Holes are on the drawing. Every mark from the same end.”

“Same end,” said Ricky, and went.

* * *

The rear of the rescue body was the walk-in, a door in the middle with a step below it that folded down, and on either side of the door two long stainless grab handles were going to go, so that a firefighter could pull himself up the step with his hands full of something heavy. The holes for the handles were on the drawing, from the edge of the door opening and from the floor of the step.

Ricky hooked his tape on the edge of the door opening. His own tape, the yellow one, twenty-five foot, fat blade. He measured up and marked, and measured across and marked, and did the next hole from the same edge, not from the last mark. He did all eight. He measured the diagonals of each set of four, and they were the same.

He called the moustache over. The moustache put his own tape on two of the marks, not all eight, and nodded.

“Drill.”

Ricky drilled. The stop collar was on. The bit went through the rear wall of the walk-in and jumped a quarter inch and stopped. He did all eight. He did not go round to check the inside, because the inside was the walk-in, and he could see it from where he was, through the door, and there was nothing on the inside wall but eight small clean holes where there should be eight small clean holes.

The moustache ran the bolts. Ricky held the nuts from inside, kneeling in the walk-in, one hand behind the wall at a time. When the handles were on, the moustache got up on the folding

step and took hold of the left one and pulled himself up by it, hard, all his weight, and it did not move.

“Good,” he said, and got down, and went to the next thing, and Ricky went with him.

A little later Walt came through bay one.

Ricky had never seen Walt on the floor of assembly before. Walt had a small cardboard box under his arm, fittings of some kind, for somebody, and he was walking through bay one on his way to somewhere else, and he did not look at anything, until he got to the rear of the rescue body and the grab handles, where he stopped.

He looked at the left one. He put the box down on the step. He took hold of the handle with one hand, a big grey-knuckled hand, and pulled on it, not hard, the way you’d test a banister in a house you were thinking of buying. It did not move.

He picked up his box and went on.

* * *

By mid-morning the shop was humming.

It was not louder than usual. It was faster. The grinders ran in shorter bursts. People walked quickly down the aisle from fab to assembly carrying things, and back from assembly to fab carrying other things, and Harjit, who had come in early too, and who had an orange on his counter at six in the morning, was at his window with a line in front of it, three people deep, handing things through without looking at his shelves. The radio in receiving was playing something with a lot of drums in it, and the forklift went back and forth through the roll-up

door with bundles of things across its forks, faster than usual, the man in the backwards cap driving with one hand and the other on the roll bar, keeping time.

Even Tony was faster. Ricky went past the brake on the way to Harjit's and Tony was bending brackets for the rescue body, small ones, one after another, and counting under his breath, and the counting was quicker than it had ever been.

Once the forklift came all the way down to bay one with the last pallet of hardware, and set it down at the end of the table, where there was exactly room for it, and backed out again without the song stopping.

In the middle of all of it, the foreman walked.

He walked at the speed he always walked. He came out of bay one and went up the aisle toward fab with his coffee, and people coming the other way with carts and brackets and armloads of flat bar went around him without breaking stride, one side or the other. He did not step aside for anybody. Nobody walked into him. He went up the aisle and stopped at the brake and watched Tony bend two brackets, and nodded, and came back down again at the same speed, and people went around him again, both ways, and he went back into bay one and stood beside the fab lead and looked at the list.

* * *

At half past ten the moustache sent Ricky up onto the roof.

The light bar needed brackets. There were four of them, bent at the brake by Tony that morning, and they had to be tacked onto the roof rail at the front of the body where the light bar

would bolt to them, and the moustache would run the welds after. There was a drawing with the bracket positions on it. There was also, it turned out, the electrician.

The electrician was on the roof already, on his knees, with a coil of wire and a drill and the green shirt. He had drilled two holes in the roof for the light bar's cables to come down through, and the holes were where the drawing said, and the brackets, when Ricky laid them where the drawing said, were two inches off from them, so that the cables would have to run under a bracket foot to get to the hole, and would get pinched.

Ricky knelt on the roof with a bracket in one hand and the drawing in the other, and looked at the electrician's holes, and at the bracket, and at the drawing.

"That's not going to work," said the electrician, pleasantly, to nobody in particular. He was looking at the bracket. "Needs to come over two inches. Toward the curb."

Ricky looked down off the roof at the moustache, who was on the ground at the foot of the ladder with the gun, waiting. The moustache had heard. The moustache was looking up at Ricky and not at the electrician, who was six feet from Ricky, on the same roof.

"Where's he want it?" said the moustache, to Ricky.

"Two inches over," said Ricky. "Toward the curb."

"Tell him that puts it off the rail."

Ricky turned to the electrician. "That puts it off the rail."

The electrician looked at the rail, and at the bracket, and at his holes. He did not look down at the moustache.

"Tell him an inch, then," the electrician said, to Ricky. "An inch and the cable clears."

Ricky looked down. "An inch."

The moustache considered this, looking up at the sky above Ricky's head.

"An inch," he said. "Tack it."

Ricky moved the bracket an inch toward the curb. The electrician looked at it and nodded, to Ricky, and went back to his wire. Ricky knelt on one knee on the roof with the gun in his hand and looked along the bracket foot, once, to see that it sat flat on the rail, and put his helmet down, and tacked it, both ends, and flipped the helmet up.

The foreman was at the foot of the ladder, beside the moustache.

"How's it going," said the foreman, looking up.

"Good," said Ricky.

The foreman looked at the bracket, and at the electrician, and at the moustache, who was looking at the sky. Then he went back to the list.

They did the other three brackets the same way. Every one of them went an inch toward the curb. Every message went down the ladder and up the ladder through Ricky, and the electrician and the moustache, who were never more than twelve feet apart all morning, did not once look at each other.

* * *

At noon the foreman went out the back.

Ricky saw him go this time, from the roof. He was standing on the roof of the rescue body with the moustache's gun in his hand, waiting while the moustache came up the ladder to run the welds, and from up there he could see over the top of the paint booth and the fab bays to the roll-up door at receiving, and the foreman going out through it with his cup, at the speed he always went, and a moment later the pickup going out through the gate.

The fab lead had ordered pizza. It came at quarter past twelve, in six boxes, and they ate it standing up on the flatbed at the side of bay one, and it was gone by twenty-five past.

"Why don't you talk to him?" Ricky said to the moustache, quietly, with a slice in his hand. He did not look at the electrician, who was sitting on the edge of the flatbed at the far end with his own slice.

"Who?" said the moustache.

Ricky looked at him. The moustache looked back, and ate his pizza.

The foreman came back at one. Nobody looked up.

* * *

In the afternoon it was the striping.

The striping was a man Ricky had never seen, who came from somewhere else and did only this, with a van full of rolls of reflective vinyl in red and white and a tool belt full of squeegees and blades. He ran a long red-and-white stripe down both sides of the rescue body at the height of a car's headlights, where it would catch them at night, and he needed somebody to hold

the far end while he laid it, and the fab lead looked around bay one and pointed at Ricky.

Ricky held the far end. He stood at the back of the body with the end of the stripe in both hands, lifted, feet apart, arms up, keeping it off the panel and keeping it tight, while the striping man worked toward him from the front with his squeegee, laying the stripe down on the brushed aluminum and pressing it flat inch by inch, and the stripe came down onto the panel ahead of the squeegee in a long straight red-and-white line.

"Don't let it sag," said the striping man. "Don't let it touch. Once it touches, it's down."

"What if it gets a bubble?"

The striping man did not look up from his squeegee.

"It doesn't get a bubble," he said, "if you don't let it touch." He pressed another inch flat. "Once there's a bubble, you can prick it with a pin and press it out, and it'll look fine from here." He nodded at the far side of the bay. "And every time the sun hits it for the next fifteen years, you'll see it from there." He nodded at the stripe, a foot from his face. "So don't let it touch."

Ricky did not let it touch.

The foreman came by at twenty to three, when the stripe was about halfway. He came down the curbside, along the panel, at the same speed, and he looked at the stripe going down, and at the striping man with his squeegee, and at Ricky at the far end with his arms up and his feet apart and the end of the stripe in his hands.

"Afternoon," said the foreman.

"Afternoon," said Ricky, not moving his arms.

The foreman stood there a moment. Then he went on round the back of the body and up the streetside and into the middle of the bay, and stood with the fab lead, and looked at the list.

The squeegee reached Ricky. The striping man took the end of the stripe out of his hands, and laid it down, and pressed it, and ran a blade along the edge of the panel, and the end fell away, a little curl of red and white on the floor.

The stripe ran the length of the body, straight, flat, without a bubble in it anywhere. You could see it from across the bay.

* * *

By three there was one line on the fab lead's list without a tick.

It was a bracket for a thermal camera, a small one, that was supposed to go in the cab, and that had not come. It was not in any of the boxes on the table. The fire department had it, the fab lead said, after twenty minutes on the phone in the office. They'd bring it tomorrow, with the crew, when they came for the truck.

"We'll put it on in the yard," the fab lead said. "Ten minutes."

He did not tick the line. He drew a small circle beside it instead.

The horn went at half past three.

Nobody stopped. The electrician was still on the roof, wiring the light bar. Sukh was in the walk-in with Len, doing the last of the seams. The moustache was running the last welds on the rear step.

"You can go," the moustache said, not looking up. "Or stay. Up to you."

Ricky stayed.

* * *

He stayed until half past five. He fetched things from Harjit, who was also still there. He held the rear step while the moustache welded it. He swept bay one, twice, around people, and then swept it again when the electrician came down off the roof in a small shower of wire ends and plastic.

At twenty past five the electrician flipped a switch in the cab, and the light bar came on.

It came on all at once, red and white, turning, throwing light across bay one and out through the big door into the yard and across the paint booth and down the aisle, red and white, red and white, over the tables and the brake and the drop rack and the scrap bin, and everybody in bay one stopped what they were doing and looked at it.

Nobody said anything. The electrician let it run for a few turns. Then he switched it off.

The shop was very quiet.

“Well,” said the moustache. “That works.”

* * *

In the lot, most of the pickups were still there. The building’s shadow had come most of the way across the lot, and it was cooler than it had been in weeks.

Ricky sat in his car with the door open. His feet hurt. His shoulders hurt from holding his arms up. There was a small cut on the back of his left hand that he had not noticed getting,

and a smear of grey aluminum on both forearms that would not come off at the sink.

He looked at the rivet head in the cupholder, and at the tape on the passenger seat.

Then he took the tape and put it on his belt, where it went, and got out of the car, and walked back up the row to the roll-up door at receiving, because he had left his lunch bag on the flatbed at the side of bay one, and it had his wallet in it, and the receipt was in the wallet.

The lunch bag was where he had left it. The rescue body stood in bay one with its lights off, finished, or almost. The foreman was standing beside it, at the rear step, alone, with his coffee, looking up at the grab handles.

Ricky picked up his bag. The foreman did not turn around.

“Night,” said Ricky.

“Goodnight,” said the foreman.

FRIDAY

THE BARBECUE WAS a thing everybody knew about and nobody had mentioned.

Ricky found out about it at ten past seven, when he came round the corner of the building from the lot and there were two big barrel barbecues on trailers in the side yard, between the building and the fence, and a man in a Titan golf shirt was pouring charcoal into one of them out of a bag the size of a child. Beside the barbecues there were three folding tables, and on the tables there were stacks of paper plates in plastic wrap, and a cooler the size of a chest freezer, and a cardboard box of buns.

“End of summer,” said one of the Marks, going past him toward the roll-up door. “Start of summer and end of summer. Lunch.”

“Every year?”

The Mark stopped and looked at him, with a kind of pity.

“Burgers,” he said, as if that answered the question, and in a way it did.

* * *

The rescue body was in bay one where they had left it, with its lights off and its doors shut and its stripe running the length of it at headlight height. It looked finished. It looked like something in a brochure.

The fab lead was already there with the list, which had one line on it that was not ticked, with a small circle beside it. The thermal camera bracket. It would come with the crew, at half past one.

“Walk round it,” the fab lead said to the moustache. “Every door. Every latch. Every light.”

They walked round it. The moustache opened every door and closed it, and listened to each one close, the small sound and the last quarter inch. Ricky went behind him with a rag and wiped the handprints off each door after it closed. He pulled the tray out in curbside three and the spreader came out on it, jaws first, handle up, under its hold-down, and he pulled the pin with his eyes open, and it came free, and he put it back. He buckled and unbuckled the air-pack straps. He pulled himself up the rear step by the left grab handle, the way the moustache had, all his weight, and it did not move.

At the front of the body, on the curbside, he stopped. The moustache was ahead of him, at curbside two.

Ricky stood and looked at the long flat panel for a moment, with the stripe across it, red and white, and the fire department’s name above the stripe in gold vinyl.

Then he wiped a handprint off it, and went on.

* * *

The foreman came by early.

Ricky was on his knees at streetside four, with his head in the compartment, checking that the tool mounts were tight with his own wrench. He heard nothing. When he backed out of the compartment the foreman was standing at the tail of the truck, with his coffee, looking along the streetside, from the tail to the cab, at the doors, at the stripe, at the handles, at Ricky on his knees with the wrench.

“Morning,” said the foreman.

“Morning.”

The foreman looked at the truck a moment longer. Then he went on round the back and up the curbside, and stopped at curbside three, and opened the door, and pulled out the tray with his foot, and looked at the spreader on it, and slid the tray back in with his foot, and closed the door, and went.

* * *

By late morning the side yard smelled of charcoal.

It came in through the roll-up doors and down the aisle, and everybody was hungry. It came out sideways. The Marks got into a short, bitter argument about whether it was worth cheese. Tony stopped counting for almost a full minute and stood at the brake with a bracket in his hand, looking out of the roll-up door toward the smell.

At a quarter to twelve the man in the Titan golf shirt at the barbecues rang a bell. It was an actual bell, a brass one, the kind that goes on a ship, bolted to a post by the barbecue trailer.

Nobody ran. But nobody walked very slowly either.

* * *

There was no long table outside.

That was the first thing Ricky noticed when he came out into the side yard with everybody else. There were the three folding tables, for the food. There was a picnic table somebody had brought from somewhere, already full. And there were the tailgates of the pickups along the fence, which had been backed up in a row for the purpose, and some upturned milk crates, and the edge of the concrete pad by the door, and the grass.

He took a plate and got in the line.

The man in the Titan golf shirt was at one barbecue. At the other one, with a pair of tongs, was the foreman.

He was not wearing an apron. He was wearing his navy work shirt with the sleeves rolled once, and he had the tongs in one hand and a spatula in the other, and his coffee on the edge of the barbecue trailer beside him, and he was putting a burger on every plate that came past. He did it without asking what anybody wanted. He put one burger on each plate, the same size, and the plate moved on, and the next plate came, and he put one on that.

When Ricky's plate came, he put one on it.

"Morning," said the foreman.

"Morning," said Ricky.

The plate moved on. Ricky moved with it, to the buns, and the ketchup, and a tub of coleslaw that someone had made at home and brought in, and a bag of chips, and a cooler of pop.

Beside the barbecue, on the ground, where it could be reached from either grill, somebody had set down a red fire extinguisher with its pin in and its tag facing out. The safety officer was standing near it, in the shade of the building, with a plate with nothing on it yet, and a bottle of water, watching the charcoal.

* * *

Ricky did not know where to sit.

He stood at the edge of the concrete pad with his plate and looked at the yard. The Marks were on a tailgate with Dale between them, arguing about cheese. The moustache was on a milk crate by the fence, talking to Len. Sukh, standing, was eating an apple. Harjit was sitting on the step of the forklift with an orange on his plate next to his burger.

At the far end of the row of trucks, by himself, the man in the cut-off sleeves was sitting on the tailgate of a pickup, eating an apple too, looking at nothing. He had a burger on a plate beside him. He had not touched it.

Ricky looked at the trucks. Near the end of the row, the tailgate of Walt's old Ford was down, the brown-over-tan one with the canopy, and nobody was on it.

He went and sat on it.

He had got the lid off his pop when Walt came along the row with his plate, and sat down on the same tailgate. He sat

at the other end of it, one space along, with room for a person between them. He put his plate on his knees. He did not look at Ricky, and he did not say anything, and he began to eat.

Ricky ate his burger.

* * *

The yard was loud, and then it was quiet, the way a room gets quiet when everybody has something in their mouth at once. The Marks settled the cheese question, in cheese's favour, and went back for seconds, and then for thirds. Tony lay back on the grass on his elbows with his eyes shut and the sun on his face. People who had not said a word to each other all month sat on the same stretch of grass and passed the ketchup.

The electrician in the green shirt came and got a burger and sat on the grass not far from the Marks, and one of the Marks passed him the chips, and the electrician took some and passed them back, and nobody said anything about it at all.

At the barbecue, when the line was gone, the foreman put the last burger on a plate for himself, and took his coffee off the trailer, and stood beside the grill, and ate it, standing, without any hurry at all, looking out over the yard.

Walt finished his burger. He wiped his fingers on a paper napkin. He reached into the pocket of his shirt, and took out a folded piece of newspaper, and unfolded it, and looked at it for a while. Ricky could see, from the other end of the tailgate, the edge of a small, neat pencil circle.

Walt folded it again, and put it back in his pocket.

He did not say anything, and Ricky did not either, and they sat on the tailgate and looked at the yard.

* * *

At half past twelve the man in the Titan golf shirt rang the brass bell again, and everybody got up.

They got up slowly, the way people get up after a big lunch in the sun, and threw their plates in the big garbage bins by the tables, and stretched, and went back in through the roll-up doors, and the foreman went in with them, carrying his coffee, at the speed he always walked.

Ricky went in behind Walt.

* * *

The fire crew came at half past one.

There were three of them, in navy T-shirts with the department's crest on the chest, and they came in a department pickup with a light bar on the roof, and parked in the side yard next to the barbecue trailers, where the charcoal was still smoking a little. One of them was older, with a grey moustache and a clipboard. The other two were about Ricky's age, or not much older, and they walked around the rescue body in bay one the way the man from the municipality had walked around the hose-reel body, slowly, with their hands in their pockets, and then with their hands out of their pockets, opening things.

The older one had a small box under his arm. It was the thermal camera bracket.

“Ten minutes,” said the fab lead, and handed it to the moustache, and the moustache handed it to Ricky.

“Cab,” said the moustache. “Dash, passenger side. Template’s in the box.”

It was ten minutes. It was a little more than ten minutes, because the template in the box was for a different model of cab and Ricky had to measure off the one on the drawing instead, from the edge of the dash, every mark from the same end, and the moustache watched him do it from the door of the cab and did not say anything. It was two small holes in a plastic dash, and nothing behind the dash that a bit could hurt, and Ricky put the stop on it anyway, because he had it in his pocket.

The bracket went on. The older firefighter put the camera in it and took it out again, and put it in again, and it clicked.

“Good,” he said, and ticked something on his own clipboard. The fab lead drew a tick through the circle on his.

* * *

While the fab lead and the older firefighter went up to the office with the paperwork, the two younger ones were left in bay one with nothing to do.

One of them wandered off down the aisle, looking at things, the way people do in a place they will never see again. After a while Ricky, going to the lunchroom to fill his water bottle, found him in there, alone, standing at the counter in front of the two coffee makers with a paper cup in his hand, looking at the pots. Ricky went past him to the sink and turned on the tap. The firefighter reached for the pot on the right. “Use the

left one,” said Ricky, holding his bottle under the tap, and the firefighter put the pot back, and took the one on the left, and poured, and said “Thanks,” and drank some, and asked Ricky how long he’d been working here, and Ricky said a month, and the firefighter said it was a nice truck, and Ricky said it was, and turned off the tap, and screwed the lid onto his bottle.

The firefighter went back out to bay one with his coffee. Ricky followed him a minute later.

* * *

The rescue body left at a quarter past two.

The older firefighter drove it. He backed it out of bay one, slowly, with the fab lead walking backwards in front of it, waving him on, and then it was in the yard, on its red chassis, in the sun, with the stripe down its side and the fire department’s name above the stripe in gold, and it was bigger out there than it had been inside, and smaller than Ricky expected.

Most of the shop had come out to watch. Nobody had said to. People just came, from fab and paint and the brake, and stood in the doorways and along the wall of the building, with their gloves in their hands, not saying anything. The estimator had come out as far as the lobby door, with his clipboard, and as the truck went past he wrote a number down.

At the gate, the older firefighter stopped the truck, and leaned out of the window, and looked back at the building.

Then he hit the lights.

The light bar came on, red and white, turning, all of it at once, bright even in the afternoon sun, and he hit the horn,

one long blast, and then two short ones. Along the wall of the building, nobody moved. Then somebody, one of the Marks, raised a hand. Then a few other people did. The truck pulled out through the gate, onto the road, and turned, with its lights still going, and went away along the frontage road toward the highway, past the taco truck, which was not there on Fridays after two, and around the bend, and was gone.

People went back in.

Ricky stood at the doorway of bay one a moment longer. It was very empty. There was a pale rectangle on the concrete, a little cleaner than the floor around it, where the truck had stood for weeks.

“Sweep that,” said the moustache, behind him.

* * *

He swept it.

After that there was a frame. It had come over from fab on its cart, a small one, plain, no kickup, for somebody’s pickup, and the moustache put the drawing on the sixth table and said, “Crossmembers,” and Ricky ran crossmembers on it for the rest of the afternoon, two on, skip, two on, letting the first inch wet in every time, and the moustache was at the other end of the frame, and neither of them said much, and it was a slow afternoon, and nothing happened in it.

At quarter past three everybody swept.

* * *

At half past three the horn went, and the shop emptied into the back lot.

It was hot, the last heat of the summer, and the tailgates were down, and the talk went in several directions at once. The hill. The other hill. The burnt barn, which was not burnt. A long weekend coming, and who was going where, and whether the forecast was right, and whether it was ever right. The Mark who had come down the hill twice had a dirt bike in his box again, orange, strapped down at the bars, and he was leaning on the tailgate with a can of pop, the way he had been leaning on it at the end of the first week.

“Rook,” he said. “You ride?”

Ricky stopped.

“No,” he said.

The Mark nodded.

Ricky did not move on. He stood there by the tailgate, with his lunch bag in one hand and his tape on his belt, and looked at the bike in the back of the truck, orange, strapped down at the bars, with dried mud on the fenders and a scratch down the side of the tank.

“Maybe,” he said.

The Mark looked at him for a moment.

“My brother’s got an old one,” he said. “In his garage. Doesn’t run right. Carburetor.” He drank some of his pop. “Needs somebody to look at it.”

“I don’t know anything about carburetors.”

“Nobody does,” said the Mark. “That’s why it doesn’t run right.”

He turned back to the other Mark, who was saying something about the forecast, and the conversation went on without Ricky in it, and Ricky walked on down the row toward his car at the end by the fence.

* * *

He sat in the car with the door open, letting the heat out.

His feet hurt, the way they had hurt every Friday. There was grey on the backs of his hands that would still be there at bedtime. The tape was on his belt. The rivet head was in the cupholder, with the change. The receipt was in his wallet, behind his licence, where it would stay until the end of probation.

Down the row, the Mark was still leaning on his tailgate. The moustache’s grey Tacoma went past, slow, and did not stop, and the moustache lifted two fingers off the wheel as it went by, and Ricky lifted two back.

He shut the door and started the car.

At the gate he stopped, and looked both ways, the way you are supposed to, and in the mirror he could see the back lot and the row of tailgates and the Marks, and Dale, who had come over from his own truck to join them, and was pointing at something in the distance with one arm straight out, explaining, and the Marks were shaking their heads, and Walt’s old Ford pulling out behind him with its canopy on and nothing in the back.

Somebody, somewhere in the row, was going to have to decide about the barn.

He pulled out onto the road and drove home.