

Container.

We each carried a small, silver suitcase. I packed his. I packed for him on every trip we had taken together for twenty-five years now. City breaks, where we were sweet to each other, where the common miseries of our daily life together slipped away on cobbled streets. I'd packed for him for conferences he'd taken alone, rooms where I wasn't welcome, rooms where he played a role I didn't know or recognise. Country retreats together where the afternoons were idle and pleasant. The same configuration in every suitcase, although the shirts, ties, underpants, changed throughout the years. I'm very good at folding clothes. We're all rewarded with certain gifts in this life. You get to know someone when you pack their suitcase for them. This was the last trip we'd ever take together. It was late, when we landed. The airport was so still it made me frightened. I pretended to be delighted by it all. My husband doesn't appreciate it when I lose control. He's practical in ways that I'm not. Like I said, this was the last trip we would take together. In the airport bathroom, I brushed my hair, a slick and tangled mess. My face in the mirror was remote, but young. No, not young, but with a certain effect of youthfulness. It was the effect that costs money, the effect that placed me in a subset of women. I'd a number of surgeries over the years, small efforts to make myself feel good. A joke my husband and I shared: he wanted to live forever, whereas I only looked like I did.

Car doors slamming, the click of the indicator when we made the turn into the facility, suitcase wheels hitting unfamiliar gravel. These were noises I knew. It could have been the start of any trip. In the lobby there was a fountain pumping out white foam. Two young boys played in front of it, screeching and laughing. They were out of place. Did they even know what was happening? Who were they here with? Parents who were planning on leaving them? Grandparents? What a terrible place to bring children. How to explain it to them. The facility was a stark, unnerving white. The television showed images of cruise ships, smiling staff, trying to strike the right tone between mournfulness and merriment. On-screen, the ship sailed effortlessly, as if powered by an unseen force. The frenzy that got people on the ship was over. Now, it was a cruise like any other. The sunset on-screen was grimly unreal, too-

bright and polished. A cruise ship containing people sailing off to eternal life. Irresponsible fucks, I thought. I thought and did not say. In our bathroom, we brushed our teeth together, my back resting against the sink. I cupped his face and asked him if he would miss me. We were not a couple given to excessive displays of emotion. Of course, he said, but some things are bigger than love. Not really, I said and spat. I don't think so.

I liked our life, and it surprised me that he did not. Possibly, this is the way every relationship ends, with one party looking for more. It was the way every relationship ends, but on a grander scale. We had arguments. I called him dreary, he called me shallow. And perhaps, I was. My fingers too familiar with his card, the ATM panel. Did I not see that this world was dying? I did, but I thought both of us might want to see it together. When he was showing me the catalogue, it occurred to me that he always thought I was dull-minded. Twenty-five years sleeping beside a woman who didn't measure up to his intellect. How unfortunate for him, what bad luck. Maybe he'd find himself a new woman in whatever life he was imagining beyond this. How would he win her over? The two of them laughing together over wine, mocking people who'd let their bodies crumble. My mind, barren as it usually is, invented some absurd images. I wasn't allowed argue with him about it. Don't ruin it, he said, this is the only thing I've ever wanted. I wanted things too, once upon a time. There were smart remarks, of course. They were clumsy, but I couldn't help myself. A dinner party with his colleagues? A drive in the countryside? No thanks, I said, I'd rather die.