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Brian Roberts

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My Flat Tire at the Flying J on Sunday Night in Blackfoot, Idaho

—Brian Roberts

An attendant, Robert, was outside in the ice popping a plug into the hole while I waited at a table. I looked past the newspaper's headlines to a classified that read, “This is to certify that my wife has left my home without just cause, and I hereby caution all persons from trusting her.” The man left his name, Henry Matthews, gave his number.

I watched the women wander in out of the darkness, most with men in tight Levi's, some alone, buying lotto tickets, gas. The boy at the register repeated, Weather any better out there? a dozen times while I watched the cars skid onto the lot.

No one lied that night. It was bad. But I waited for someone to say she thought it was lightening up, and I listed everything I wouldn't say to Mr. Matthews through a payphone, if I heard her.

Robert came in holding my plugged tire, the Goodyear bulging on one side like a distended tattoo. He said, She's all swelled up. You busted the belting. Have to buy a new one tomorrow morning. What are my chances of making it three hundred miles on that tire tonight? About fifty-fifty, he said. Everything to me is fifty-fifty—it either happens or it don't. But if you blow out on this ice, you're dead.

I decided to wait for Mrs. Matthews, who, as likely as not, would give me better odds.