

Muß er?

Feder climbs the brief stair. He climbs the brief stair always up. The one stair and the next indistinguishable. There is the foot on the stair. Or he might say that the foot resorts to the stair. It is the north emergency stair, each day the same. So he does not count them. Up or down, he does not count. Today Feder finds an insect on the stair in the usual place. It lies upturned with its feet in the air. He is reassured by the placement of the insect. He cannot recall a time when the insect was not there. He scarcely notices it as he pulls the heavy metal door and disappears into the corridor.

There are rows and stacks. And windows occasionally. The room is divided into squares of shadow and light. A dark light nonetheless. A ceilinged room and underfoot a floor. It is no point making an assumption about the constitutive elements of the room nor attempting to ascertain its dimensions. Nothing of the room is different today compared to yesterday. No one sees it empty or fill.

There is a flicker. Someone has forgotten to replace the seal.

A hand pushes aside a small mound of dirt. The insect is dropped onto its back and covered over with care.

Among the rows and stacks one might imagine a line of smoke and a slow, undeliberate asphyxiation. It is not remarkable. A dull knocking perhaps. An iron grate at another moment in history.

These are not the counted bodies. There is nothing left to be counted. Not because of a lack of objects. Simply the system of numbers upon which they had hitherto relied had fallen into disuse.

In the time before there were many accusations. There were many trials. The people stood and they sat. The transcripts are indicative of negation. Several untranslated languages have accounted for this. The substitutive passages maintain a strong indication of hopefulness.

It is Feder's job to light the fires.

It had a name.

In the fields cut up into city blocks the name was pronounced many times. Sometimes shouted. No one doubted the force of the name. And so it was repeated often. The water was brought to a very high temperature according to custom and the people moved around on their knees. In the moments when the structure was overturned, the people appeared to be suspended from a sky of concrete.

The body at the foot of the stair shows no evidence of having fallen. The head is at an awkward angle. Since the stair is seldom employed, the body is not remarked upon.

In the small adjacent garden the fountain is being drained. The gate is pulled shut and the low wall is worn. Periodically the stones are removed, brushed off and replaced in the same order in which they were initially assembled. There is no record of the wall having been built and the city ordinance requiring that it be taken down and rebuilt at regular intervals has been misplaced. The task as it is outlined requires that each stone resume its initial placement. This applies to chipped or cracked stones as well. The time allotted to the habitual disassembly and immediate reconstruction of the wall is insufficient. Reports have been filed in protest with little success. The workers are required to report to the captain of the work site in advance of the assignment of their duty.

Even if someone had seen the body land there, none would have been able to identify it as the body of a person. Whether it had fallen from a great height or collapsed in the exact place where

it happened to be standing, the fall had exerted a great strain on the features of the face. Why assume a misdeed? If the body had indeed been carrying something, the something was gone. The registry of missing persons will not be consulted. Nor will the stolen effects be searched for and retrieved.

But the body is lying face down.

This is not unusual in coastal cities and border towns where jurisdictions are under much dispute. It will not matter that the body may have come from somewhere. The thread is snapped. The method of the body's disposal is yet to be determined. This case resembles so many others of its kind and requires caution and tact.

Sir?

Is it sleeping?