

*Man's measure.*

Upon arriving at the unremarkable bluish-grey building, it occurred to the man that he could not remember how he got there. Inside was a single room with chairs, a door on the opposite end, a desk where the clerk sat writing in his ledger, and a single clock on the wall that had no hands. On the door was a brass plate that read: *For those who are ready.*

As the man approached the door he said to the clerk "I wish to enter." The clerk nodded, as if this was expected. "You may. The door is unlocked. It always has been." The man stepped forward and touched the knob. It turned easily. Yet when he pulled the door, it did not move. He tried again, harder. Nothing.

"You hesitate," the clerk observed, still writing.

"I am not hesitating. The door is stuck."

"It is not stuck. You are measuring yourself against it."

The days spent trying to open the door blurred into weeks. The man brought a chair over to the door and sat before it. He tried at different hours, though there were no hours, with different levels of strength, and with varying attitudes. Each time the knob turned, but the door held. He spoke to the clerk often.

"Perhaps I need permission," the man suggested.

"You have it."

"Perhaps there is a password."

"The password is the one you already know."

"Perhaps I am not yet worthy."

At this the clerk looked up for the first time. His eyes were the man's own eyes, calm and slightly disappointed. "It was always you," the clerk said.

Those words settled in the air and the room suddenly fell far more silent, as silent as a grave. The man felt the words in his chest at first, then stinging behind his eyes – her voice, thin and certain on white sheets, the faint smell of rain and antiseptics in the air now. No one else had been in the room. No one else could have heard.

Overcome with surprise, then fear, fury, and tremendous sadness, the man finally asked:

“Why does it still not open?”

“Because you are still asking me.”

Years passed, or perhaps only hours. The man’s clothes worn at the elbows. His hair grayed in patches. He kept a mental log of his attempts, searched for clues in the clerk’s face and in the way the light occasionally flickered, but after many attempts, the door remained closed. He once shouted and struck the door with his fists until his knuckles bled. The clerk observed without comment, as still as winter.

One evening, though there were no evenings, the man sat exhausted, broken, and lovelorn on the floor, back against the wall, staring at his hands. They were thinner now, but steady. He noticed for the first time that the clerk’s ledger was blank. Every page he had watched being filled was empty. “Who are you, really?” the man asked quietly.

The clerk closed the book. “I am the measure you invented so you would not have to cross.”

The clerk’s words bloomed in his mind. The man felt as if a great weight had been lifted from his body. He stood, walked to the door without ceremony, and turned the knob. For the first time he did not pull as a petitioner, but as someone simply opening what was his. The door moved – barely an inch – revealing a warm light and the sound of wind in open space. He knew with sudden clarity, that he could step through. The strength was always there and nothing had ever barred him.

He stood, still holding the knob, feeling the immense possibility on the other side. A life unhesitating. A self unmeasured. The weight he had carried for so long – the one that made every forward step feel like betrayal – was gone, and the man could breathe.

The clerk said nothing more. There was no need.

The man remained in the room a moment longer, breathing the new air coming through the door. He did not step forward. Not yet. But the door stayed open, and for the first time he did not close it.