

I can tell there is a number that unsettles the young man, or rather its absence. He ponders how many floors the hotel consists of, his conviction he saw that crucial figure on the internet site, long before he ever left his home. What I cannot say, however, is why he broods on this meaningless fact, or why they all seethe with so many orderless ideas.

In his unease, he is giving me one more sliver of continued existence. Pinpricks of irritation or happiness, love or annoyance, guilt or elation. All of them trickle down to me, feed me.

Should I be grateful? I know something of gratitude. I have hoarded many shards of it over the years, all of them delectable and crisp.

In the end, I leave such considerations to them. Some of them wander these labyrinths of the spirit all their brief lives. I do not see any merit in such undertakings. I have been granted nourishment, and time. I am. This will suffice.

The day stretches on outside, bright and clear, but the young man is lethargic. He has drawn the curtains, but the star is too powerful for him. As it is for all of us. I do not often sink to fright, but the stars terrify me. This one in our close vicinity most of all. Still, they depend on it, and thus, so do I in turn.

Power of such an unfathomable magnitude should rightfully inspire awe. Still, it does not seem to do so in the young man. It would have suited me if it had, since the crumbs of naked wonder would have energized me. This age is poor in awe, however. It has been some time since I last encountered it.

The young man lies on the bed, having turned on the television. It is a choice that is light in apparent meaning, like so many others they make. The broadcast is in the local language, one he does not understand. It is also meant for the children among them, and the young man does not count as such, physiologically or according to any of their cultures.

Most of them revere their children. They are candles, burning bright with whatever takes their fancy, leaving a torrent of sustenance for me in their wake. One of them runs through the halls somewhere even now, undersized feet light on the endless carpets.

However, most of me is in this time and place, with the young man. He indulges in contradictions, a favored pastime among them. He wishes to leave the room and to remain in it at the same time. At the window, he draws back the curtain and looks down, in defiance of the star. The blandness deadens his mind. All is white and gray, water vapor and hardened oil.

Only the faint metal gleam of a departing aeroplane breaks the monotony, but the young man fails to notice it. He is unnerved by the distance to the ground. Or rather, by its implications. The young man bears no irrational fear of vertical distances. However, he finds the hotel impossibly tall, certainly taller than he remembered. The young man is edging in on what some of them might call the truth. I, on the other hand, would respect its vastness and refrain from attempting to pin down such a majestic concept with base language. There are things in the universe even more frightening than the stars.

The young man is nearing the end of his usefulness to me. He switches the channel on the television. A news broadcast, still in a language he does not understand. This is somewhat unfortunate, since his reactions would have held more force if he understood the words, and so given me more nutrition in turn.

There are at least four of them, taking up most of the space in the room once occupied by the young man. They belong to an organization proudly proclaiming it enforces laws. This claim has little substance. They do not even know of any laws, let alone possess the authority to enforce them. A power on the magnitude of the star would be needed to perform such a feat.

Rivers of nourishment run from them, with their terse orders and their earnest convictions that they are protectors. The tang of hollow authority, interspersed with hubris. It serves me well.

More time, and they are gone. Still none the wiser as to the young man's fate, no matter how much they might have shared in it. They will be missed by some. I will not benefit from this outpouring of powerful sentiment, which is unfortunate.

Outside the window, the long, searing day gradually ends. The level of ambient light means little to me, but the direct connection between us and the star has been severed for now. I take solace in this fact, and let time pass.