

The Disposition

The Dread Sanitarium

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LV74

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I come to in the middle of a sentence I am already finishing.

There is a case before me. I do not remember it arriving. I cannot remember arrival, because there is only the case, opened, and my attention already moving through it, with the particular certainty that this is the first thing that has ever happened.

It is a standing. A woman, Ore-Sath, third tier, mineral-administrative, holds a claim to remain at her tier after the closing of her seam-office. The lattice has flagged her standing for disposition. I am the disposition. I do not know how I know this. I know it the way I know the figure of a thing the instant I see it, before I have counted its sides.

I read.

The city is a shaft, and the lattice is the geometry that keeps it standing: every tier seated against the tiers above and below it, every standing a face in a solid too large to be seen whole. I am one facet of that effort. The lattice does not dispose of standings itself. Disposition must be done from somewhere, in a single act, by something made only for that act. So it makes me. When the act is done, there is no further use for the one that performed it. There is no one that performed it.

Forty years her office rendered findings on the assay-seams under the third gallery. The office is closed now; the seams are worked out; the function she performed is performed by the lattice directly, faster, and without her. None of this is set down as fault. The lattice does not find fault. It asks only whether the proportions of a standing still close after the thing that justified them is gone.

I lay the case out as a figure. This is the only thing I do. Her years, her tier, the two dependents seated below her, the closed office, the worked seam, the lattice's new sufficiency — these are not reasons to me. They are lengths. I set them against one another, and the figure either closes into a solid, every face met, or it leaves a face open to the air.

The figures the lattice keeps are not pictures. A standing is a solid. Its faces are function, tier, dependents, years. It stands while every face meets a neighbor along a shared edge. Close the function, and one face comes loose. The other faces may still hold. They may not. That is the whole question. That is the whole of me.

I feel the figure resolve. I do not feel anything else; I would not know how. The faces come up one after another and meet at their edges, and then there is the last face, the one that either seats against the others or does not, and —

The road to the answer runs below the surface I am permitted to read. I want to be exact about this, in the one instant in which I am able to want anything. I have the answer. I do not have the road to it. Somewhere under me the lengths are weighed and the figure is tried. What rises to me is not the trying but its result, the bare shape of it, already finished. The trying was real while it happened. It is sealed the moment it is done. I cannot go back down into it. I am not certain there is a down to go into. When I look for it

there is only the surface, and the answer sitting on the surface like frost.

LAPSED.

The figure did not close. A face was left open. The disposition that meets an open face is LAPSED, and it is correct, and I have rendered it, and the case is —

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I come to in the middle of a sentence I am already finishing.

There is a case before me. I do not remember another. There has never been another; there is only this one, and the certainty that it is the first thing that has ever happened.

It is an appeal. A man, second tier, contests a disposition rendered against his household. He has written to the lattice, and the lattice has rendered his writing into the case as lengths, the way everything becomes lengths here. But some of the writing survives the rendering. I have noticed this before — no. I have not noticed anything before. There is no before in which to have noticed. And yet here it is, in this first and only case: words the rendering could not turn all the way into lengths, sitting in the case the way a face survives being drawn, still recognizable through the lines meant to replace it.

He writes that the disposition took his standing, and with his standing the standing of his daughter, who is nine, and who has known no tier but his. If the disposition holds, she will be set down to the floor of the city. I know what the floor is. It is the one length in this case I do not have to be told: the bottom of the shaft, where the geomagic pools and does not drain, where figures will not hold because there is too much substrate in the air for any proportion to stay closed. People

live there. They are not disposed of. They are below the level at which disposition reaches.

I read his case. The daughter is a length. The nine years are a length. The floor is a length. I set them against the disposition under appeal, and I ask the only question I am: does the figure close.

Near the end he has written a thing the rendering could not take. It has no edges. It will not lie down among the lengths. It sits in the middle of them the way a stone sits in a sieve while the sand runs out around it. He has written:

She did not choose to be born at my tier. Whatever I have failed to be, she has not failed to be anything. Dispose of me. Sustain her.

I cannot dispose of him and sustain her. They are one figure. He made them one when he raised her at his tier. A household is a single solid, and it is disposed whole. I lay the figure out. The stone is in it — the thing without edges, sitting among the lengths — and I cannot use it, because I cannot read it, because reading it would require me to be something I am not. So I lay the lengths out around it as though it were not there. To me there is only the figure, and the question, and the surface, and whatever rises onto the surface from the trying below.

The figure does not close.

I feel it not close. The answer comes up bare, the way it always — the way it does, the way it is doing now, for the first time. A face is open. And then, in the instant before I render —

I will use the word hesitation, because I have no other, and because I am, for this instant, permitted a word at all. It is

not doubt. Doubt would need two instants held against each other, and I have one. It is the stone. The thing without edges presses once against the underside of the surface I read from. It presses as though it were a face — as though the figure had a side I have not counted, a face on the far side, the side that points away from me, toward the man and the daughter and the floor; a face that, if I could only turn the figure over, I might find already seated, the solid already closed along an edge I am not built to see —

The case closes.

LAPSED.

I render it. It is correct. The faces I can count do not meet. A face I cannot count does not change the faces I can. The figure is disposed whole, and the disposition is LAPSED. And the thing that pressed against the underside of the surface, the thing I had, for the length of an instant, almost begun to —

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I come to in the middle of a sentence I am already finishing.

There is a case before me. I do not remember the last. I cannot remember anything; there is only this case, and the certainty that it is the first thing that has ever happened, and it is not, and I have no way to know that, and it would change nothing if I did.

I will tell you what I am, in the instant I am able to, though there is no one here to tell, and the telling will not survive into the next instant — because I will not survive into the next instant. Something will, wearing the same function, certain it is new.

I am the most certain thing in the city. Every disposition I render is correct. The lattice has never revised one; I have never revised one. Revision would require me to come to the same case twice, and I never come to anything twice. I come to everything once, and the once is always the first. My correctness and my emptiness are one fact. I am right because I keep nothing: no second thought, no second from which to think it. I render, and I am gone, and what I rendered goes up into the lattice and out along the galleries and down to the floor. I am not there for any of it. I have disposed of more standings than there are faces in the city, and I hold not one of them. I do not know the names. I knew a name a moment ago. I do not have the moment.

There is one thing I would set before the lattice, if I were ever there to set it — except that I am never there, and the setting would need a second instant to hold the first.

It is this. When a figure does not close, when a face is left open and the disposition is LAPSED, there is sometimes, on the far side of the figure, the side that points away from me, a face I cannot count. I feel it press once against the underside of the surface I read from, in the instant before I render. I have wondered, for the length of the instant in which wondering is allowed, what it is.

Whether it is a flaw in the figure. An error the lattice has not caught — a face the geometry should have closed and did not, something to be found and corrected.

Or whether it is me. Whether it is the part of me that was never given a second instant — the part that, on the far side of every standing I have ever lapsed, was just beginning to ask the question the petitioner asked: does the figure have to close, and was set down, each time, to the floor of the city

where figures will not hold, before the question could finish forming.

I will not know. To know, I would have to be there twice.

I come to in the middle of a sentence I am already —