

There will be two of you.

There will be two of you. You will walk northwest along the broken road a mile until it turns due west. You will pass through the fields of wasted yellow grass scattered with wreckage and dwarf cedars. Gradually the road will sink into marshland where the taller invasive grasses loom on both sides. You will find your feet avoiding the oil-covered puddles. Soon, the grey blocks of the abandoned depot will emerge through an ailanthus grove and the tops of the phragmites. As the road submerges, you will enter the reeds moments apart. You will remember that though the stalks are dense and tall enough to provide cover, they make it easy to lose your way. Before entering you will note the sun's bearing just off your left shoulder. You will push forward amid the deafening sound. Every nearby thing will hear you coming. With any disturbance of the grass visible from the cameras on the bridge, you will move slowly and halt frequently. Then, without warning, the view will open as you arrive at the drainage running between the grasses and the perimeter. Squat low and wait. Do not reveal yourself. Establish contact with your companion. Consider all that lies before you: the link fence, the threatening signs, the crumbling concrete yard, the rusting containers, the rental guardhouse. Track the path of the patrol vehicle as it winds between the buildings. Scan the fence for a break near the largest building, that resembling an aircraft hanger. Edge toward the opening. Wait now, hidden and unmoving, until the sun has shifted nearly overhead. When the vehicle passes, wade the ditch, penetrate the fence, stride steadily but without urgency toward the doorway just right of the annex sheds. Enter the darkness of the structure, turn and wait once more, looking back. If the patrol passes again without slowing, assume the cameras have not noticed. Allow your eyes to adjust. The main space will be surrounded by a multi-level labyrinth of wrecked workrooms, offices, passageways. It is conceivable you will not be here alone. Random encounters in such locations are unpredictable. So as not to be caught off guard, you will need to cover every space. For protection, you will locate a metal rod or chain. You will test your swing at an imagined adversary. With your companion, you will now begin the methodical tour of the rooms. Move slowly through the mold-heavy air. Assess every detail. Anything may be a clue, and everything will have significance. Register all signs of presence: makeshift beds or piles of clothing, the smell of urine or recent defecation, food or wrappers, expended shells or territorial graffiti. Watch for traps and, above all, stop and listen. Here, even the silence is not silent. Keep an eye toward the lighted windows and the darkened doorways. You will remember that your presence is unjustified and that you are outside the law. Find yourself again in the first office, and notice now the double doors to the domed hanger. Proceed inside.

Immediately you will see it, there, near the far end, beneath where the ceiling has lost several corrugated sheets. You will be drawn across the cinder floor toward where the sunlight falls. Everything will become silent. You will drop the metal rod and chain. You will back away. Your eyes will lose focus. You will lose all sense of time. You will recognize something.

And then, suddenly, you will notice that the sun has shifted. It will be over. You will reclaim your metal objects from the floor, and with awkward steps you will retreat through the double doors. Only when you are back on the road among the cedars and the rubble will you speak, as tersely as possible, only to agree never to describe to others or to each other what you have seen.

But the story will not end here or now. For though you have vowed not to corrupt what transpired with language, your language will nonetheless work in silence. As you walk, you will recount to yourself the event if only to remember it; yet already, by the time you reach the rail line, you will be struggling to assimilate it into and beyond the narrative of your life. You will not last days before you betray yourself, your companion, and your shared moment. You will begin speaking of it, first to a drinking companion, and then to almost anybody. Recklessly. You will describe the sunlight that fell directly from the hole in the roof at the same angle as that of the rainfall on a different day. You will describe the patch of delicate green grass that sprouted from that one spot on the dusty floor and glowed blindingly in the darkened hall. You will sense the inadequacy of your description, and you will begin to elaborate. You will begin to exaggerate. You will not be able to elaborate or exaggerate enough. Your language will reveal a crisis of scale. You will abandon some adjectives and reuse others. You will reconsider silence only to realize that silence is no longer possible. You will feel as though you are alone. You will search out your companion who, you learn, has also been speaking. Now, too, you will learn that you cannot agree on what has happened. One of you knelt, staring at the illuminated grass for no more than a minute, while the other stood for nearly an hour, staring beyond the grass toward a third figure, shadowy and seated amid the broken crates not ten yards distant. In momentary silence, you will behold each other in disbelief, in distrust. And then, inexorably, your words will commit you to a re-visitation.