

THE GATE-KEEPER

I

I was standing at the gate. I am still standing there, as time remembers, though action has transpired. I am waiting for an arrival, or departure: some more detailed tedious information of motion.

I prefer the still, graphic picture of my standing at the gate.

Seconds ago
that was the station of my memory
and that pose, all I saw, remains somewhere in mind.

Yes! there were comings and goings of importance to some people, but I stood there and must stand there for old people who kept servants.

While they live
shadows stage, motionless of lip and eye. The scene needs no repair, no thought for after-life.

I was, I am standing at the gate: a memory of position I can't shift for them – tiresome though my stance may seem.

II

A goat is tethered near and pokes his head between rail and crossmember, to nibble my white pocket-handkerchief which flags beside his tuft of beard.

I think this makes the goat seem as some ancient mandarin. I am in elite and timeless company – the mindless posted guard for a fragile mandarin midst all his silks and porcelain; drilled not to move, not open-shut the gate lest time shake down the shelves of china and let the palace sway towards an open space, with dark winds blowing towards nowhere known.