

Poseidon

by Franz Kafka

translated from the German by Justin Verceles

Poseidon sat at his desk and kept accounts. Managing all the world's waterbodies gave him endless work. He could have had as many assistants as he wanted—and indeed he had many—but since he took his work very seriously, he was calculating everything again, so his assistants couldn't help him much. No one could say that he liked his work; he only did it because he had to. Indeed, he'd already tried multiple times to apply for something more—as he expressed it—enjoyable, but every time he was suggested some other positions, it became eminently clear that no other position appealed to him like his previous one. It was also very difficult for him to find anything else. After all, he couldn't just be assigned a particular ocean, for instance. Only a magisterial position was fit for the great Poseidon; never mind that his current computational work, while not trivial, was still provincial. And when offered a position away from the waters, he grew ill just from the image, such that his divine breath wavered and his iron ribcage shook. These appeals were scarcely taken to heart. Yet when the Mighty anguish, one must try to feign submission in even the most desperate matters. No one was seriously thinking of relieving Poseidon of his position; he was designated god of the sea long ago and was to remain as such.

What put him out most of all—and accounted for the bulk of his discontent—was hearing the notions people had of him, like that he was always riding upon the main, trident at hand. Meanwhile, here he sat at the bottom of the ocean, always calculating and never breaking the tedium but for the occasional trip to Jupiter—a trip, by the way, from which he would most often come back enraged. Consequently, he hardly ever saw the seas, except fleetingly on his hurried ascents to Mount Olympus; he never actually rode through them. He used to say he was waiting for the end times, which might allow him a still moment after reviewing his last calculation to make a quick, preterminal round of the world.