

Audio file

[2024-11-12 KST Kafka 08 An Imperial Message v1.mp3](#)

Transcript

An imperial message. The emperor – it is said – has sent to you, the one apart, the wretched subject, the tiny shadow that fled far, far from the imperial sun, precisely to you he has sent a message from his deathbed. He bade the messenger kneel by his bed and whispered the message in his ear; so greatly did he value the message that he had him repeat it into his ear. With a nod of his head, he confirmed the accuracy of the messenger's words. And before the entire spectatorship of his death – all obstructing walls are torn down and the dignitaries of the empire stand in a ring upon the wide and soaring open stairways – before all these he dispatched the messenger. The messenger set out at once; a strong and indefatigable man, thrusting forward now one arm, now the other, he clears a path through the crowd; whenever he meets resistance he points to his breast, which bears the sign of the sun; and he advances easily like no other. But the crowds are so vast; their dwellings know no bounds. How he would fly if open country were to stretch before him, and you would soon hear the splendid pounding of his fists on your door. But instead, how uselessly he toils; he is still pressing through the chambers of the innermost palace; never will he prevail; and were he to succeed at this, nothing would be gained; he would have to fight his way down the steps; and were he to succeed at this, nothing would be gained; the courtyards would still have to be crossed and, after the courtyards, the second enclosing palace, and again stairways and courtyards, and again a palace and so on through thousands of years; and were he at last to burst through the outermost gate – but never, never can this happen – before him first lies the capital city, the middle of the world, with its dregs piled high. No one can push through here, least of all with a message from one who is dead. You, however, sit at your window and dream of it when evening comes.