

# KAFKA

## F R A N Z

A NEW  
TRANSLATION  
BASED ON  
THE RESTORED  
TEXT

## THE TRIAL

"Brian Mitchell's translation is an accomplishment of the highest order that will honor Kafka far into the twenty-first century."—WALTER ABISH, author of *How German Is It*

The Trial

Franz Kafka

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The Arrest / Conversation with Frau Grubach --

Then Fräulein Bürstner

SOMEONE must have traduced Joseph K., for without having done anything wrong he

was arrested one fine morning. His landlady's cook, who always brought him his breakfast

at eight o'clock, failed to appear on this occasion. That had never happened before. K.

waited for a little while longer, watching from his pillow the old lady opposite, who

seemed to be peering at him with a curiosity unusual even for her, but then, feeling both

put out and hungry, he rang the bell. At once there was a knock at the door and a man

entered whom he had never seen before in the house. He was slim and yet well knit, he

wore a closely fitting black suit, which was furnished with all sorts of pleats, pockets,

buckles, and buttons, as well as a belt, like a tourist's outfit, and in consequence looked

eminently practical, though one could not quite tell what actual purpose it served. "Who

are you?" asked K., half raising himself in bed. But the man ignored the question, as

though his appearance needed no explanation, and merely said: "Did you ring?" "Anna is

to bring me my breakfast," said K., and then studied the fellow, Silently and carefully,

trying to make out who he could be. The man did not submit to this scrutiny for very long,

but turned to the door and opened it slightly so as to report to someone who was evidently

standing just behind it: "He says Anna is to bring him his breakfast." A short guffaw from

the next room came in answer; and it rather sounded as if several people had joined in.

Although the strange man could not have learned anything from it that he did not know

already, he now said to K., as if passing on a statement: "It can't be done." "This is news

indeed," cried K., springing out of bed and quickly pulling on his trousers. "I must see

what people these are next door, and how Frau Grubach can account to me for such

behavior." Yet it occurred to him at once that he should not have said this aloud and that

by doing so he had in a way admitted the stranger's right to superintend his actions; still,

that did not seem important to him at the moment. The stranger, however, took his words

in some such sense, for he asked: "Hadh't you better stay here?" "I shall neither stay here

nor let you address me until you have introduced yourself." "I meant well enough," said

the stranger, and then of his own accord threw the door open. In the next room, which K.

entered more slowly than he had intended, everything looked at first glance almost as it

had the evening before. It was Frau Grubach's living room; perhaps among all the

furniture, rugs, china, and photographs with which it was crammed there was a little more

free space than usual, yet one did not perceive that at first, especially as the main change

consisted in the presence of a man who was sitting at the open window reading a book,

from which he now glanced up. "You should have stayed in your room! Didn't Franz tell

you that?" "Yes, but what are you doing here?" asked K., looking from his new

acquaintance to the man called Franz, who was still standing by the door, and then back again. Through the open window he had another glimpse of the old woman, who with truly

senile inquisitiveness had moved along to the window exactly opposite, in order to go on

seeing all that could be seen. "I'd better get Frau Grubach--" said K., as if wrenching

himself away from the two men (though they were standing at quite a distance from him)

and making as if to go out. "No," said the man at the window, flinging the book down on

the table and getting up. "You can't go out, you are arrested." "So it seems," said K. "But

what for?" he added. "We are not authorized to tell you that. Go to your room and wait

there. Proceedings have been instituted against you, and you will be informed of

everything in due course. I am exceeding my instructions in speaking freely to you like

this. But I hope nobody hears me except Franz, and he himself has been too free with you,

against his express instructions. If you continue to have as good luck as you have had in

the choice of your warders, then you can be confident of the final result." K. felt he must

sit down, but now he saw that there was no seat in the whole room except the chair beside

the window. "You'll soon discover that we're telling you the truth," said Franz, advancing

toward him simultaneously with the other man. The latter overtopped K. enormously and

kept clapping him on th. shoulder. They both examined his nightshirt and said that he

would have to wear a less fancy shirt now, but that they would take charge of this one and

the rest of his underwear and, if his case turned out well, restore them to him later. "Much

better give these things to us than hand them over to the depot," they said, "for in the depot

there's lots of thieving, and besides they sell everything there after a certain length of time,

no matter whether your case is settled or not. And you never know how long these cases

will last, especially these days. Of course you would get the money out of the depot in the

long run, but in the first place the prices they pay you are always wretched, for they sell

your things to the best briber, not the best bidder, and anyhow it's well known that money

dwindles a lot if it passes from hand to hand from one year to another." K. paid hardly any

attention to this advice. Any right to dispose of his own things which he might possess he

did not prize very highly; far more important to him was the necessity to understand his

situation clearly; but with these people beside him he could not even think. The belly of

the second warder -- for they could only be warders -- kept butting against him in an

almost friendly way, yet if he looked up he caught sight of a face which did not in the least

suit that fat body, a dry, bony face with a great nose, twisted to one side, which seemed to

be consulting over his head with the other warder. Who could these men be? What were

they talking about? What authority could they represent? K. lived in a country with a legal

constitution, there was universal peace, all the laws were in force; who dared seize him in

his own dwelling? He had always been inclined to take things easily, to believe in the

worst only when the worst happened, to take no care for the morrow even when the

outlook was threatening. But that struck him as not being the right policy here, one could

certainly regard the whole thing as a joke, a rude joke which his colleagues in the Bank

had concocted for some unknown reason, perhaps because this was his thirtieth birthday,



that was of course possible, perhaps he had only to laugh knowingly in these men's faces

and they would laugh with him, perhaps they were merely porters from the street corner --

they looked very like it -- nevertheless his very first glance at the man Franz had decided

him for the time being not to give away any advantage that he might possess over these people. There was a slight risk that later on his friends might possibly say he could not take

a joke, but he had in mind -- though it was not usual with him to learn from experience --

several occasions, of no importance in themselves, when against all his friends' advice he

had behaved with deliberate recklessness and without the slightest regard for possible

consequences, and had had in the end to pay dearly for it. That must not happen again, at

least not this time; if this was a comedy he would insist on playing it to the end.

But he was still free. "Allow me," he said, passing quickly between the warders to his

room. "He seems to have some sense," he heard one of them saying behind him. When he

reached his room he at once pulled out the drawer of his desk. Everything lay there in

perfect orders but in his agitation he could not find at first the identification papers for

which he was looking. At last he found his bicycle license and was about to start off with it

to the warders, but then it seemed too trivial a thing, and he searched again until he found

his birth certificate. As he was re-entering the next room the opposite door opened and

Frau Grubach showed herself. He saw her only for an instant, for no sooner did she

recognize him than she was obviously overcome by embarrassment, apologized for

intruding, vanished, and shut the door again with the utmost care. "Come in, do," he would

just have had time to say. But he merely stood holding his papers in the middle of the

room, looking at the door, which did not open again, and was only recalled to attention by

a shout from the warders, who were sitting at a table by the open window and, as he now

saw, devouring his breakfast. "Why didn't she come in?" he asked. "She isn't allowed to,"

said the tall warder, "since you're under arrest." "But how can I be under arrest? And

particularly in such a ridiculous fashion?" "So now you're beginning it all over again?"

said the warder, dipping a slice of bread and butter into the honey-pot. "We don't answer

such questions." "You'll have to answer them," said K. "Here are my papers, now show me

yours, and first of all your warrant for arresting me." "Oh, good Lord," said the warder. "If

you would only realize your position, and if you wouldn't insist on uselessly annoying us

two, who probably mean better by you and stand closer to you than any other people in the

world." "That's so, you can believe that," said Franz, not raising to his lips the coffee-cup

he held in his hand, but instead giving K. a long, apparently significant, yet incomprehensible look. Without wishing it K. found himself decoyed into an exchange of

speaking looks with Franz, none the less he tapped his papers and repeated: "Here are my

identification papers." "What are your papers to us?" cried the tall warder. "You're

behaving worse than a child. What are you after? Do you think you'll bring this fine case of

yours to a speedier end by wrangling with us, your warders, over papers and warrants? We

are humble subordinates who can scarcely find our way through a legal document and have

nothing to do with your case except to stand guard over you for ten hours a day and draw

our pay for it. That's all we are, but we're quite capable of grasping the fact that the high

authorities we serve, before they would order such an arrest as this, must be quite well

informed about the reasons for the arrest and the person of the prisoner. There can be no

mistake about that. Our officials, so far as I know them, and I know only the lowest grades

among them, never go hunting for crime in the populace, but, as the Law decrees, are

drawn toward the guilty and must then send out us warders. That is the Law. How could there be a mistake in that?" "I don't know this Law," said K. "All the worse for you,"

replied the warder. "And it probably exists nowhere but in your own head," said K.; he

wanted in some way to enter into the thoughts of the warders and twist them to his own

advantage or else try to acclimatize himself to them. But the warder merely said in a

discouraging voice: "You'll come up against it yet." Franz interrupted: "See, Willem, he

admits that he doesn't know the Law and yet he claims he's innocent." "You're quite right,

but you'll never make a man like that see reason," replied the other. K. gave no further

answer; "Must I," he thought, "let myself be confused still worse by the gabble of those

wretched hirelings? -- they admit themselves that's all they are. They're talking of things,

in any case, which they don't understand. Plain stupidity is the only thing that can give

them such assurance. A few words with a man on my own level of intelligence would

make everything far clearer than hours of talk with these two." He walked up and down a

few times in the free part of the room; at the other side of the street he could still see the

old woman, who had now dragged to the window an even older man, whom she was

holding round the waist. K. felt he must put an end to this farce. "Take me to your superior

officer," he said. "When he orders me, not before," retorted the warder called Willem.

"And now I advise you," he went on, "to go to your room, stay quietly there, and wait for

what may be decided about you. Our advice to you is not to let yourself be distracted by

vain thoughts, but to collect yourself, for great demands will be made upon you. You

haven't treated us as our kind advances to you deserved, you have forgotten that we, no

matter who we may be, are at least free men compared to you; that is no small advantage.

All the same, we are prepared, if you have any money, to bring you a little breakfast from

the coffee-house across the street."

Without replying to this offer K. remained standing where he was for a moment. If he

were to open the door of the next room or even the door leading to the hail, perhaps the

two of them would not dare to hinder him, perhaps that would be the simplest solution of

the whole business, to bring it to a head. But perhaps they might seize him after all, and if

he were once down, all the superiority would be lost which in a certain sense he still

retained. Accordingly, instead of a quick solution he chose that certainty which the natural

course of things would be bound to bring, and went back to his room without another word

having been said by him or by the warders.

He flung himself on his bed and took from the washstand a fine apple which he had

laid out the night before for his breakfast. Now it was all the breakfast he would have, but

in any case, as the first few bites assured him, much better than the breakfast from the

filthy night café, would have been, which the grace of his warders might have secured him.

He felt fit and confident, he would miss his work in the Bank that morning, it was true, but

that would be easily overlooked, considering the comparatively high post he held there.

Should he give the real reason for his absence? He considered doing so. If they did not

believe him, which in the circumstances would be understandable, he could produce Frau

Grubach as a witness, or even the two odd creatures over the way, who were now probably

meandering back again to the window opposite his room. K. was surprised, at least he was surprised considering the warders' point of view, that they had sent him to his room

and left him alone there, where he had abundant opportunities to take his life. Though at

the same time he also asked himself, looking at it from his own point of view, what

possible ground he could have to do so. Because two warders were sitting next door and

had intercepted his breakfast? To take his life would be such a senseless act that, even if he

wished, he could not bring himself to do it because of its very senselessness. If the

intellectual poverty of the warders were not so manifest, he might almost assume that they

too saw no danger in leaving him alone, for the very same reason. They were quite at

liberty to watch him now while he went to a wall-cupboard where he kept a bottle of good

brandy, while he filled a glass and drank it down to make up for his breakfast, and then

drank a second to give him courage, the last one only as a precaution, for the improbable

contingency that it might be needed.

Then a shout came from the next room which made him start so violently that his

teeth rattled against the glass. "The Inspector wants you," was its tenor. It was merely the

tone of it that startled him, a curt, military bark with which we would never have credited

the warder Franz. The command itself was actually welcome to him. "At last," he shouted

back, closing the cupboard and hurrying at once into the next room. There the two warders

were standing, and, as if that were a matter of course, immediately drove him back into his

room again. "What are you thinking of?" they cried. "Do you imagine you can appear

before the Inspector in your shirt? He'll have you well thrashed, and us too." "Let me

alone, damn you," cried K., who by now had been forced back to his wardrobe. "If you



grab me out of bed, you can't expect to find me all dressed up in my best suit." "That can't

be helped," said the warders, who as soon as K. raised his voice always grew quite calm,

indeed almost melancholy, and thus contrived either to confuse him or to some extent

bring him to his senses. "Silly formalities !" he growled,

but immediately lifted a coat from a chair and held it up for a little while in both hands, as

if displaying it to the warders for their approval. They shook their heads. "It must be a

black coat," they said. Thereupon K. flung the coat on the floor and said -- he did not

himself know in what sense he meant the words -- "But this isn't the capital charge yet."

The warders smiled, but stuck to their: "It must be a black coat." "If it's to dispatch my case

any quicker, I don't mind," replied K., opening the wardrobe, where he searched for a long

time among his many suits, chose his best black one, a lounge suit which had caused

almost a sensation among his acquaintances because of its elegance, then selected another

shirt and began to dress with great care. In his secret heart he thought he had managed after

all to speed up the proceedings, for the warders had forgotten to make him take a bath. He

kept an eye on them to see if they would remember the ducking, but of course it never

occurred to them, yet on the other hand Willem did not forget to send Franz to the

Inspector with the information that K. was dressing.

When he was fully dressed he had to walk, with Willem treading on his heels, through

the next room, which was now empty, into the adjoining one, whose double doors were flung open. This room, as K. knew quite well, had recently been taken by a Fräulein

Bürstner, a typist, who went very early to work, came home late, and with whom he had

exchanged little more than a few words in passing. Now the night table beside her bed had

been pushed into the middle of the floor to serve as a desk, and the Inspector was sitting

behind it. He had crossed his legs, and one arm was resting on the back of the chair. \*

In a corner of the room three young men were standing looking at Fräulein Bürstner's

photographs, which were stuck into a mat hanging on the wall. A white blouse dangled

from the latch of the open window. In the window over the way the two old creatures were

again stationed, but they had enlarged their party, for behind them, towering head and

shoulders above them, stood a man with a shirt open at the neck and a reddish, pointed

beard, which he kept pinching and twisting with his fingers. "Joseph K.?" asked the

Inspector, perhaps merely to draw K.'s roving glance upon himself. K. nodded. "You are

presumably very much surprised at the events of this morning?" asked the Inspector, with

both hands rearranging the few things that lay on the night table, a candle and a matchbox,

a book and a pincushion, as if they were objects which he required for his interrogation.

"Certainly," said K., and he was filled with pleasure at having encountered a sensible man

at last, with whom he could discuss the matter. "Certainly, I am surprised, but I am by no

means very much surprised." "Not very much surprised?" asked the Inspector, setting the

candle in the middle of the table and then grouping the other things round it. "Perhaps you

misunderstand me," K. hastened to add. "I mean" -- here K. stopped and looked round him

for a chair. "I suppose I may sit down?" he asked. "It's not usual," answered the Inspector.

"I mean," said K. without further parley, "that I am very much surprised, of course, but

when one has lived for thirty years in this world and had to fight one's way through it, as I

have had to do, one becomes hardened to surprises and doesn't take them too seriously.

Particularly the one this morning." \* "Why particularly the one this morning?" "I won't

say that I regard the whole thing as a joke, for the preparations that have been made seem

too elaborate for that. The whole staff of the boarding-house would have to be involved, as

well as all you people, and that would be past a joke. So I don't say that it's a joke." "Quite

right," said the Inspector, looking to see how many matches there were in the matchbox.

"But on the other hand," K. went on, turning to everybody there -- he wanted to bring in

the three young men standing beside the photographs as well -- "on the other hand, it can't

be an affair of any great importance either. I argue this from the fact that though I am

accused of something, I cannot recall the slightest offense that might be charged against

me. But that even is of minor importance, the real question is, who accuses me P What

authority is conducting these proceedings? Are you officers of the law?  
None of you has a

uniform, unless your suit" -- here he turned to Franz -- "is to be considered  
a uniform, but

it's more like a tourist's outfit. I demand a clear answer to these questions,  
and I feel sure

that after an explanation we shall be able to part from each other on the best  
of terms." The

Inspector flung the matchbox down on the table. "You are laboring under a  
great

delusion," he said. "These gentlemen here and myself have no standing  
whatever in this

affair of yours, indeed we know hardly anything about it. We might wear  
the most official uniforms and your case would not be a penny the worse. I  
can't even confirm that you are

charged with an offense, or rather I don't know whether you are. You are  
under arrest,

certainly, more than that I do not know. Perhaps the warders have given you  
a different

impression, but they are only irresponsible gossips. \* However, if I can't  
answer your

questions, I can at least give you a piece of advice; think less about us and  
of what is going

to happen to you, think more about yourself instead. And don't make such  
an outcry about

your feeling innocent, it spoils the not unfavorable impression you make in  
other respects.

Also you should be far more reticent, nearly everything you have just said could have been

implied in your behavior with the help of a word here and there, and in any case does not

redound particularly to your credit."

K. stared at the Inspector. Was he to be taught lessons in manners by a man probably

younger than himself? To be punished for his frankness by a rebuke? And about the cause

of his arrest and about its instigator was he to learn nothing?

He was thrown into a certain agitation, and began to walk up and down -- nobody

hindered him -- pushed back his cuffs, fingered his shirt-front, ruffled his hair, and as he

passed the three young men said: "This is sheer nonsense!" Whereupon they turned toward

him and regarded him sympathetically but gravely; at last he came to a stand before the

Inspector's table. "Hasterer, the lawyer, is a personal friend of mine," he said. "May I

telephone to him?" "Certainly," replied the Inspector, "but I don't see what sense there

would be in that, unless you have some private business of your own to consult him

about." "What sense would there be in that ?" cried K., more in amazement than

exasperation. "What kind of man are you, then? You ask me to be sensible and you carry

on in the most senseless way imaginable yourself! It's enough to sicken the dogs. People

first fall upon me in my own house and then lounge about the room and put me through my

paces for your benefit. What sense would there be in telephoning to a lawyer when I'm

supposed to be under arrest? All right, I won't telephone." "But do telephone if you want

to," replied the Inspector, waving an arm toward the entrance hall, where the telephone

was, "please do telephone." "No, I don't want to now," said K., going over to the window.

Across the street the party of three was still on the watch, and their enjoyment of the

spectacle received its first slight check when K. appeared at the window. The two old

people moved as if to get up, but the man at the back pacified them. "Here's a fine crowd

of spectators!" cried K. in a loud voice to the Inspector, pointing at them with his finger.

"Go away," he shouted across. The three of them immediately retreated a few steps, the

two ancients actually took cover behind the younger man, who shielded them with his

massive body and to judge from the movements of his lips was saying something which,

owing to the distance, could not be distinguished. Yet they did not remove themselves

altogether, but seemed to be waiting for the chance to return to the window again

unobserved. "Officious, inconsiderate wretches !" said K. as he turned back to the room

again. The Inspector was possibly of the same mind, K. fancied, as far as he could tell

from a hasty side-glance. But it was equally possible that the Inspector had not even been listening, for he had pressed one hand firmly on the table and seemed to be comparing the

length of his fingers. The two warders sat on a chest draped with an embroidered cloth,

rubbing their knees. The three young men were looking aimlessly round them with their

hands on their hips. It was as quiet as in some deserted office. "Come, gentlemen," cried K.

-- it seemed to him for the moment as if he were responsible for all of them -- "from the

look of you this affair of mine seems to be settled. In my opinion the best thing now would

be to bother no more about the justice or injustice of your behavior and settle the matter

amicably by shaking hands on it. If you are of the same opinion, why, then--" and he



stepped over to the Inspector's table and held out his hand. The Inspector raised his eyes,

bit his lips, and looked at K.'s hand stretched out to him; K. still believed he was going to

close with the offer. But instead he got up, seized a hard round hat lying on Fräulein

Bürstner's bed, and with both hands put it carefully on his head, as if he were trying it on

for the first time. "How simple it all seems to you!" he said to K. as he did so. "You think

we should settle the matter amicably, do you? No, no, that really can't be done. On the

other hand I don't mean to suggest that you should give up hope. Why should you? You are

only under arrest, nothing more. I was requested to inform you of this. I have done so, and

I have also observed your reactions. That's enough for today, and we can say good-by,

though only for the time being, naturally. You'll be going to the Bank now, I suppose?"

"To the Bank?" asked K. "I thought I was under arrest?" K. asked the question with a

certain defiance, for though his offer to shake hands had been ignored, he felt more and

more independent of all these people, especially now that the Inspector had risen to his

feet. He was playing with them. He considered the idea of running after them to the front

door as they left and challenging them to take him prisoner. So he said again: "How can I

go to the Bank, if I am under arrest?" "Ah, I see," said the Inspector, who had already

reached the door. "You have misunderstood me. You are under arrest, certainly, but that

need not hinder you from going about your business. Nor will you be prevented from

leading your ordinary life." "Then being arrested isn't so very bad," said K., going up to the

Inspector. "I never suggested that it was," said the Inspector. "But in that case it would

seem there was no particular necessity to tell me about it," said K., moving still closer. The

others had drawn near too. They were all gathered now in a little space beside the door. "It

was my duty," said the Inspector. "A stupid duty," said K. inflexibly. "That may be,"

replied the Inspector, "but we needn't waste our time with such arguments. I was assuming

that you would want to go to the Bank. As you are such a quibbler over words, let me add

that I am not forcing you to go to the Bank, I was merely assuming that you would want to

go. And to facilitate that, and render your arrival at the Bank as unobtrusive as possible, I

have detained these three gentlemen here, who are colleagues of yours, to be at your

disposal." "What?" cried K., gaping at the three of them. These insignificant anemic young

men, whom he had observed only as a group standing beside the photographs, were

actually clerks in the Bank, not colleagues of his -- that was putting it too strongly and

indicated a gap in the omniscience of the Inspector -- but they were subordinate employees

of the Bank all the same. How could he have failed to notice that? He must have been very

much taken up with the Inspector and the warders not to recognize these three young men.

The stiff Rabensteiner swinging his arms, the fair Kullich with the deep-set eyes, and Kaminer with his insupportable smile, caused by a chronic muscular twitch. "Good

morning!" said K. after a pause, holding out his hand to the three politely bowing figures.

"I didn't recognize you. Well, shall we go to our work now, eh?" The young men nodded,

smilingly and eagerly, as if they had been waiting all the time merely for this, but when K.

turned to get his hat, which he had left in his room, they all fled one after the other to fetch

it, which seemed to indicate a certain embarrassment. K. stood still and watched them

through the two open doors; the languid Rabensteiner, naturally, brought up the rear, for he

merely minced along at an elegant trot. Kaminer handed over the hat and K. had to tell

himself expressly, as indeed he had often to do in the Bank, that Kaminer's smile was not

intentional, that the man could not smile intentionally if he tried. Then Frau Grubach, who

did not appear to be particularly conscious of any guilt, opened the front door to let the

whole company out, and K. glanced down, as so often before, at her apron-string, which

made such an unreasonably deep cut in her massive body. Down below he decided, his

watch in his hand, to take a taxi so as to save any further delay in reaching the Bank, for he

was already half an hour late. Kaminer ran to the corner to get a taxi, the other two were

obviously doing their best to distract K., when suddenly Kullich pointed to the opposite

house door, where the tall man with the reddish, pointed beard was emerging into sight,

and immediately, a little embarrassed at showing himself in his full height, retreated

against the wall and leaned there. The old couple must be still coming down the stairs. K.

was annoyed at Kullich for drawing his attention to the man, whom he had already

identified, indeed whom he had actually expected to see. "Don't look across," he said

hurriedly, without noticing how strange it must seem to speak in that fashion to grown-up

men. But no explanation proved necessary, for at that moment the taxi arrived, they took

their seats and drove off. Then K. remembered that he had not noticed the Inspector and

the warders leaving, the Inspector had usurped his attention so that he did not recognize the

three clerks, and the clerks in turn had made him oblivious of the Inspector. That did not

show much presence of mind, and K. resolved to be more careful in this respect. Yet in

spite of himself he turned round and craned from the back of the car to see if he could

perhaps catch sight of the Inspector and the warders. But he immediately turned away

again and leaned back comfortably in the corner without even having attempted to

distinguish one of them. Unlikely as it might seem, this was just the moment when he

would have welcomed a few words from his companions, but the others seemed to be

suddenly tired: Rabensteiner gazed out to the right, Kullich to the left, and only Kaminer

faced him with his nervous grin, which, unfortunately, on grounds of humanity could not

be made a subject of conversation.

That spring K. had been accustomed to pass his evenings in this way: after work

whenever possible -- he was usually in his office until nine -- he would take a short walk,

alone or with some of his colleagues, and then go to a beer hall, where until eleven he sat

at a table patronized mostly by elderly men. But there were exceptions to this routine,

when, for instance, the Manager of the Bank, who highly valued his diligence and

reliability, invited him for a drive or for dinner at his villa. And once a week K. visited a

girl called Elsa, who was on duty all night till early morning as a waitress in a cabaret and during the day received her visitors in bed.

But on this evening -- the day had passed quickly, filled with pressing work and many

flattering and friendly birthday wishes -- K. resolved to go straight home. During every

brief pause in the day's work he had kept this resolve in mind; without his quite knowing

why, it seemed to him that the whole household of Frau Grubach had been thrown into

great disorder by the events of the morning and that it was his task alone to put it right

again. Once order was restored, every trace of these events would be obliterated and things

would resume their old course. From the three clerks themselves nothing was to be feared,

they had been absorbed once more in the great hierarchy of the Bank, no change was to be

remarked in them. K. had several times called them singly and collectively to his room,

with no other purpose than to observe them: each time he had dismissed them again with a

quiet mind. \*

When at half past nine he arrived at the house where he lived he found a young lad in

the street doorway, standing with his legs wide apart and smoking a pipe. "Who are you?"

K. asked at once, bringing his face close to the lad's -- one could not see very well in the

darkness of the entrance. "I'm the house-porter's son, sir," said the lad, taking the pipe from

his mouth and stepping aside. "The house-porter's son ?" asked K., tapping his stick

impatiently on the ground. "Do you want anything, sir? Shall I fetch my father?" "No, no,"

said K., and his voice had a reassuring note, as if the lad had done something wrong but

was to be forgiven. "It's all right," he said and went on, yet before he climbed the stair he

turned round for another look.

He had intended to go straight to his room, but as he wanted to speak to Frau Grubach

he stopped instead to knock at her door. She was sitting darning at a table, on which lay a

heap of old stockings. K. excused himself awkwardly for knocking so late, but Frau

Grubach was most cordial and would hear of no apology, she was always glad to have a

talk with him, he knew very well that he was her best and most valued boarder. K. looked

round the room; it had reverted completely to its old state, the breakfast dishes which had

stood that morning on the table by the window had apparently been cleared away.

Women's hands are quietly effective, he thought. He himself might have smashed the



dishes on the spot, but he certainly could never have quietly carried them away. He gazed

at Frau Grubach with a certain gratitude. "Why are you still working at this late hour?" he

asked. They were both sitting at the table now, and from time to time K. buried one hand

in the pile of stockings. "There's a lot to do," she said; "during the day my time belongs to

my boarders; for keeping my own things in order I have only the evenings." "I'm afraid

I've been responsible for giving you extra work today." "How is that?" she asked,

becoming more intent, the work resting in her lap. "I mean the men who were here this

morning." "Oh, that," she said, resuming her composure, "that didn't give me much to do."

K. looked on in silence while she took up her darning again. ("She seems surprised that I

mentioned it," he thought, "she seems to think it not quite right that I should mention it. All the more need for me to do so. I couldn't mention it to anyone but this old woman.") "It

must certainly have made more work," he said at last, "but it won't happen again." "No,

that can't happen again," she said reassuringly, with an almost sorrowful smile. "Do you

really mean it?" asked K. "Yes," she said softly, "and above all you mustn't take it too

much to heart. Lots of things happen in this world! As you've spoken so frankly to me,

Herr K., I may as well admit to you that I listened for a little behind the door and that the

two warders told me a few things too. It's a matter of your happiness, and I really have that

at heart, more perhaps than I should, for I am only your landlady. Well, then, I heard a few

things, but I can't say that they were particularly bad. No. You are under arrest, certainly,

but not as a thief is under arrest. If one's arrested as a thief, that's a bad business, but as for

this arrest -- It gives me the feeling of something very learned, forgive me if what I say is

stupid, it gives me the feeling of something learned which I don't understand, but which

there is no need to understand."

"What you've just said is by no means stupid, Frau Grubach, at least I'm partly of the

same opinion, except that I judge the whole thing still more severely. There's nothing

learned about it. It's completely null and void. I was taken by surprise, that was all. If

immediately on wakening I had got up without troubling my head about Anna's absence

and had come to you without regarding anyone who tried to bar my way, I could have

breakfasted in the kitchen for a change and could have got you to bring me my clothes

from my room; in short, if I had behaved sensibly, nothing further would have happened,

all this would have been nipped in the bud. But one is so unprepared. In the Bank, for

instance, I am always prepared, nothing of that kind could possibly happen to me there, I

have my own attendant, the general telephone and the office telephone stand before me on

my desk, people keep coming in to see me, clients and clerks, and above all, my mind is

always on my work and so kept on the alert, it would be an actual pleasure to me if a

situation like that cropped up in the Bank. Well, it's past history now and I didn't really

intend to speak about it again, only I wanted to hear your judgment, the judgment of a

sensible woman, and I am very glad we are in agreement. But now you must give me your

hand on it, an agreement such as this must be confirmed with a handshake."

"Will she take my hand? The Inspector wouldn't do it," he thought, gazing at the

woman with a different, a critical eye. She stood up because he had stood up, she was a

little embarrassed, for she had not understood all that he had said. And because of her

embarrassment she said something which she had not intended to say and which was,

moreover, rather out of place. "Don't take it so much to heart, Herr K.," she said with tears

in her voice, forgetting, naturally, to shake his hand. "I had no idea that I was taking it to

heart," said K., suddenly tired and seeing how little it mattered whether she agreed with

him or not.

At the door he asked: "Is Fräulein Bürstner in?" "No," replied Frau Grubach, and in giving this dry piece of information she smiled with honest if belated sympathy. "She's at

the theater. Do you want to ask her something? Shall I give her a message?" "Oh, I just

wanted a word or two with her." "I'm afraid I don't know when she will be back; when she

goes to the theater she's usually late." "It's of no consequence," said K., turning to the door,

his head sunk on his breast. "I only wanted to apologize to her for having borrowed her

room today." "That's quite unnecessary, Herr K., you are too scrupulous, Fräulein Bürstner

knows nothing about it, she hasn't been back since early this morning, everything has been

put back in its place again too, see for yourself." And she opened the door of Fräulein

Bürstner's room. "Thanks, I believe you," said K., but went in through the open door all the

same. The moon shone softly into the dark chamber. As far as one could see everything

was really in its proper place, and the blouse was no longer dangling from the latch of the

window. The pillows on the bed looked strangely high, they were lying partly in the

moonlight. "She often comes home late," said K., looking at Frau Grubach as if she were

to blame for it. "Young people are like that," said Frau Grubach apologetically. "Certainly,

certainly," said K., "but it can go too far." "That it can," said Frau Grubach, "how right you

are, Herr K.! In this case especially, perhaps. I have no wish to speak ill of Fräulein

Bürstner, she is a dear, good girl, kind, decent, punctual, industrious, I admire all these

qualities in her, but one thing is undeniable, she should have more pride, should keep

herself more to herself. This very month I have met her twice already on outlying streets,

and each time with a different gentleman. It worries me, and as sure as I stand here, Herr

K., I haven't told anybody but you, but I'm afraid there's no help for it, I shall have to talk

to Fräulein Bürstner herself about it. Besides, it isn't the only thing that has made me

suspicious of her." "You're quite on the wrong track," said K., with a sudden fury which he

was scarcely able to hide, "and you have obviously misunderstood my remark about

Fräulein Bürstner, it wasn't meant in that way. In fact I frankly warn you against saying

anything to her; you're quite mistaken, I know Fräulein Bürstner very well, there isn't a

word of truth in what you say. But perhaps I'm going too far myself. I don't want to

interfere, you can say what you like to her. Good night." "Good night, Herr K.," said Frau

Grubach imploringly, hurrying after him to his door, which he had already opened, "I don't

really mean to say anything to her yet, of course I'll wait to see what happens before I do

anything, you're the only one I've spoken to, in confidence. After all it must be to the

interest of all my boarders that I try to keep my house respectable, and that is all I'm

anxious about in this case." "Respectable!" cried K., through the chink of the door; "if you

want to keep your house respectable you'll have to begin by giving me notice." Then he

shut the door and paid no attention to the faint knocking that ensued.

On the other hand, as he felt no desire to sleep, he resolved to stay awake and take the

opportunity of noting at what hour Fräulein Bürstner returned. Perhaps when she did so it

might still be possible, unsuitable though the hour was, to have a few words with her. As

he lounged by the window and shut his tired eyes, he actually considered for a moment

paying Frau Grubach out by persuading Fräulein Bürstner to give notice along with him.

Yet he saw at once that this was an excessive reaction, and he began to suspect himself of

wishing to change his lodgings because of that, morning's events. Nothing could be more senseless, not to say pointless and contemptible. \*

When he became weary of gazing out into the empty street he lay down on the sofa,

after having slightly opened the door to the entrance hall, so that from where he was lying

he might see at once anyone who came in. Until about eleven he lay quietly on the sofa

smoking a cigar. But then he could not endure lying there any longer and took a step or

two into the entrance hall, as if that would make Fräulein Bürstner come all the sooner. He

felt no special desire to see her, he could not even remember exactly how she looked, but

he wanted to talk to her now, and he was exasperated that her being so late should further

disturb and derange the end of such a day. She was to blame, too, for the fact that he had

not eaten any supper and that he had put off the visit to Elsa he had proposed making that

evening. He could remedy both omissions still, it was true, by going straight to the wine

restaurant where Elsa worked. He would do that later, he decided, after his talk with

Fräulein Bürstner.

It was a little after half past eleven when he heard somebody on the stairs. Absorbed

in his thoughts, he had been marching up and down the entrance hall for some time as if it

were his own room, and now he fled behind his bedroom door. It was Fräulein Bürstner

coming in. As she locked the front door she shivered and drew her silk shawl round her



slim shoulders. In a minute she would be going into her room, where K. certainly could not

intrude at such an hour; he would therefore have to speak to her now, but unfortunately he

had forgotten to switch on the light in his room, so that if he were to emerge out of the

darkness it would look as if he were waylaying her and at least must be somewhat

alarming. No time was to be lost, so in his confusion he whispered through the chink of the

door: "Fräulein Bürstner." It sounded like a prayer, not like a summons. "Is anyone there?"

asked Fräulein Bürstner, looking round with wide-open eyes. "It's I," said K., stepping

forward. "Oh, Herr K. !" said Fräulein Bürstner, smiling. "Good evening," and she held out

her hand to him. "I should like to have a word or two with you, will you allow me to do so

now?" "Now?" asked Fräulein Bürstner. "Must it be now? A little unusual, isn't it?" "I've

been waiting for you ever since nine." "Well, I was at the theater, you know, I had no idea

you were waiting." "What I want to talk to you about didn't happen till today." "Oh, well, I

have no serious objection, except that I am so tired I can scarcely stand on my feet. So

come for a few minutes to my room. We can't possibly talk here, we should waken

everybody, and I should dislike that for our own sakes even more than for theirs. Wait here

till I have turned on the light in my room, and then you can switch off the light here." K.

did so, but waited until Fräulein Bürstner from her room again invited him, in a whisper, to

come in. Take a seat," she said, pointing to the sofa; she herself stood leaning against the

foot of the bed in spite of her confessed weariness; she did not even take off her small but

lavishly flower-bedecked hat. "Well, what is it? I am really curious." She crossed her

ankles. "Perhaps you will say," began K., "that there was no urgent need to speak about it

now, but--" "I never listen to preambles," said Fräulein Bürstner. "That makes it easier for

me," said K. "This morning your room was thrown into some slight confusion and the fault

was mine in a certain sense, it was done by strange people against my will, and yet as I have said the fault was mine; I want to beg your pardon for this." "My room?" asked

Fräulein Bürstner, and she cast a critical eye round the room instead of looking at him.

"That is so," said K., and now they gazed into each other's eyes for the first time. "The

actual manner in which it happened isn't worth mentioning." "But surely that is the really

interesting part," said Fräulein Bürstner. "No," said K. "Well," said Fräulein Bürstner, "I

don't want to pry into secrets; if you insist that it is uninteresting, I shall not argue the

point. You have begged my pardon and I herewith freely grant it, particularly as I can find

no trace of disturbance." With her open palms pressed to her hips, she made a tour of the

room. Beside the mat where the photographs were stuck she stopped. "Look here," she

cried, "my photographs are all mixed up! That is really odious. So someone has actually

been in my room who had no right to come in." K. nodded and silently cursed the clerk

Kaminer, who could never control his stupid, meaningless fidgeting. "It is curious," said

Fräulein Bürstner, "that I should be compelled now to forbid you to do something which

you ought to forbid yourself to do, that is to enter my room in my absence." "But I have

explained to you, Fräulein," said K., going over to the photographs, "that it was not I who

interfered with these photographs; still, as you won't believe me, I have to confess that the

Court of Inquiry brought three Bank clerks here, one of whom, and I shall have him

dismissed at the first opportunity, must have meddled with your photographs." In answer

to the Fräulein's inquiring look he added: "Yes, there was a Court of Inquiry here today."

"On your account?" asked the Fräulein. "Yes," replied K. "No !" cried the girl, laughing.

"Yes, it was," said K. "Why, do you think I must be innocent ?" "Well, innocent," said

Fräulein Bürstner, "I don't want to commit myself, at a moment's notice, to a verdict with

so many possible implications, besides, I don't really know you; all the same, it must be a

serious crime that would bring a Court of Inquiry down on a man. Yet as you are still at

large -- at least I gather from the look of you that you haven't just escaped from prison --

you couldn't really have committed a serious crime." "Yes," said K., "but the Court of

Inquiry might have discovered, not that I was innocent, but that I was not so guilty as they

had assumed." "Certainly, that is possible," said Fräulein Bürstner, very much on the alert.

"You see," said K. "you haven't much experience in legal matters." "No, I haven't," said

Fräulein Bürstner, "and I have often regretted it, for I would like to know everything there

is to know, and law courts interest me particularly. A court of law has a curious attraction,

hasn't it? But I'll soon remedy my ignorance in that respect, for next month I am joining

the clerical staff of a lawyer's office." "That's excellent," said K. "Then you'll be able to

help me a little with my case." "That may well be," said Fräulein Bürstner, "why not? I like

to make good use of my knowledge." "But I mean it seriously," said K., "or at least halfseriously,

as you yourself mean it. The case is too trifling to need a lawyer, but I could do

very well with an adviser." "Yes, but if I am to be an adviser I must know what it's all

about," said Fräulein Bürstner. "That's just the trouble," said K. "I don't know that myself."

"Then you've simply been making fun of me," said Fräulein Bürstner, extravagantly

disappointed, "it was surely unnecessary to choose this late hour for doing so." And she

walked away from the photographs, where they had been standing together for a long time.

"But, Fräulein," said K., "I'm not making fun of you. Why won't you believe me? I have

already told you all I know. In fact more than I know, for it was not a real Court of Inquiry. I called it that because I didn't know what else to call it. There was no interrogation at all, I

was merely arrested, but it was done by a Commission." Fräulein Bürstner sat down on the

sofa and laughed again. \* "What was it like, then?" she asked. "Horrible," said K., but he

was no longer thinking of what he was saying, for he was completely taken up in staring at

Fräulein Bürstner, who was leaning her head on one hand -- her elbow was resting on the

sofa cushions -- while with the other she slowly caressed her hip. "That's too general," she

said. "What's too general?" asked K. Then he came to himself and asked: "Shall I let you

see how it happened?" He wanted to move about and yet he did not want to leave. "I'm

tired," said Fräulein Bürstner. "You came home so late," said K. "So you've gone the

length of reproaching me, and I deserve it, too, for I should never have let you in. And

there was no need for it, either, that's evident." "There was a need for it. I'll make you see

that in a minute," said K. "May I shift this night table from beside your bed?" "What an

idea !" cried Fräulein Bürstner. "Of course not !" "Then I can't show you how it happened,"

said K. in agitation, as if some immeasurable wrong had been inflicted upon him. "Oh, if

you need it for your performance, shift the table by all means," said Fräulein Bürstner, and

after a pause added in a smaller voice: "I'm so tired that I'm letting you take too many

liberties." K. stationed the table in the middle of the room and sat down behind it. "You

must picture to yourself exactly where the various people are, it's very interesting. I am the

Inspector, over there on the chest two warders are sitting, beside the photographs three

young men are standing. At the latch of the window -- just to mention it in passing -- a

white blouse is dangling. And now we can begin. Oh, I've forgotten about myself, the most

important person; well, I'm standing here in front of the table. The Inspector is lounging at

his ease with his legs crossed, his arm hanging over the back of the chair like this, an

absolute boor. And now we can really begin. The Inspector shouts as if he had to waken

me out of my sleep, he actually bawls; I'm afraid, if I am to make you understand, I'll have

to bawl too, but he only bawls my name." Fräulein Bürstner, who was listening with

amusement, put her finger to her lips to keep K. from shouting, but it was too late, K. was

too absorbed in his role, he gave a long-drawn shout: "Joseph K.," less loud indeed than he

had threatened, but with such explosive force that it hung in the air a moment before

gradually spreading through the room.

Then there was a knocking at the door of the adjoining room, a loud, sharp regular

tattoo. Fräulein Bürstner turned pale and put her hand to her heart. K. was violently

startled, it took him a moment or so to withdraw his thoughts from the events of the

morning and the girl before whom he was acting them. No sooner had he come to himself

than he rushed over to Fräulein Bürstner and seized her hand. "Don't be afraid," he

whispered, "I'll put everything right. But who can it be? There's only the living room next

door, nobody sleeps there." "No," Fräulein Bürstner whispered in his ear, "since yesterday

a nephew of Frau Grubach has been sleeping there, a Captain. There was no other room he

could have. I forgot all about it. Why did you have to shout like that? I'm all upset."



"There's no need for that," said K., and as she sank back on the cushions he kissed her on

the brow. "Away with you, away with you," she said, hastily sitting up again, "do go away, do go now, what are you thinking about, he's listening at the door, he hears everything.

How you torment me !" "I won't go," said K., "until you are a little calmer. Come to the far

corner of the room, he can't hear us there." She let herself be led there. "You forget," he

said, "that though this may mean unpleasantness for you, it is not at all serious. You know

how Frau Grubach, who has the decisive voice in this matter, particularly as the Captain is

her nephew, you know how she almost venerates me and believes absolutely everything I

say. She is also dependent on me, I may say, for she has borrowed a fair sum of money

from me. I shall confirm any explanation of our being together here that you like to invent,

if it is in the least practicable, and I pledge myself to make Frau Grubach not only publicly

accept it but also really and honestly believe it. You needn't consider me at all. If you want

to have it announced that I assaulted you, then Frau Grubach will be informed accordingly

and she will believe it without losing her confidence in me, she's so devoted to me."

Fräulein Bürstner, silent and somewhat limp, stared at the floor. "Why shouldn't Frau

Grubach believe that I assaulted you?" K. added. He was gazing at her hair: it was reddish

hair, parted in the middle and fastened with a bun at the back, and very neatly dressed. He

expected her to look up at him, but she said without changing her posture: "Forgive me, I

was terrified at the sudden knocking rather than at any consequence of the Captain's being

there. It was so still after you shouted and then there came these knocks, that was why I

was so terrified, I was sitting quite near the door, too, the knocking seemed to be just

beside me. I thank you for your offer, but I'm not going to accept it. I can bear the

responsibility for anything that happens in my room, no matter who questions it. I'm

surprised you don't see the insult to me that is implied in your suggestion, together with

your good intentions, of course, which I do appreciate. But now go, leave me to myself, I

need more than ever to be left in peace. The few minutes you begged for have stretched to

half an hour and more." K. clasped her hand and then her wrist. "But you aren't angry with

me he asked. She shook his hand off and answered: "No, no, I'm never angry with

anybody." lie felt for her wrist again, she let him take it this time and so led him to the

door. He was firmly resolved to leave. But at the door he stopped as if he had not expected

to find a door there; Fräulein Bürstner seized this moment to free herself, open the door,

and slip into the entrance hall, where she whispered: "Now, please do come! Look" -- she

pointed to the Captain's door, underneath which showed a strip of light -- "he has turned on

his light and is amusing himself at our expense." "I'm just coming," K. said, rushed out,

seized her, and kissed her first on the lips, then all over the face, like some thirsty animal

lapping greedily at a spring of long-sought fresh water. Finally he kissed her on the neck,

right on the throat, and kept his lips there for a long time. A slight noise from the Captain's

room made him look up. "I'm going now," he said; he wanted to call Fräulein Bürstner by

her first name, but he did not know what it was. She nodded wearily, resigned her hand for

him to kiss, half turning away as if she were unaware of what she did, and went into her

room with down-bent head. Shortly afterwards K. was in his bed. He fell asleep almost at

once, but before doing so he thought for a little about his behavior, he was pleased with it,

yet surprised that he was not still more pleased; he was seriously concerned for Fräulein

Bürstner because of the Captain. Chapter 2

First Interrogation

K. WAS informed by telephone that next Sunday a short inquiry into his case would take

place. His attention was drawn to the fact that these inquiries would now follow each other

regularly, perhaps not every week, but at more frequent intervals as time went on. It was in

the general interest, on the one hand, that the case should be quickly concluded, but on the

other hand the interrogations must be thorough in every respect, although, because of the

strain involved, they must never last too long. For this reason the expedient of these

rapidly succeeding but short interrogations had been chosen. Sunday had been selected as

the day of inquiry so that K. might not be disturbed in his professional work. It was

assumed that he would agree to this arrangement, but if he preferred some other day they

would meet his wishes to the best of their ability. For instance, it would be possible to hold

the inquiries during the night, although then K. would probably not be fresh enough. At

any rate they would expect him on Sunday, if K. had no objection. It was, of course,

understood that he must appear without fail, he did not need to be reminded of that. He

was given the number of the house where he had to go, it was a house in an outlying

suburban street where he had never been before.

On receiving this message K. replaced the receiver without answering; his mind was

made up to keep the appointment on Sunday, it was absolutely essential, the case was

getting under way and he must fight it; this first interrogation must also be the last. He was

still standing thoughtfully beside the telephone when he heard behind him the voice of the

Assistant Manager, who wanted to telephone and found K. barring his way. "Bad news?"

asked the Assistant Manager casually, not really wanting to know but merely eager to get

K. away from the telephone. "No, no," said K., stepping aside but without going away. The

Assistant Manager lifted the receiver and said, speaking round it while he waited to be

connected: "Oh, a word with you, Herr K. Would you do me the favor of joining a party on

my yacht on Sunday morning? There will be quite a large party, doubtless some of your

friends will be among them. Herr Hasterer, the lawyer, among others. Will you come? Do

come K. made an effort to attend to what the Assistant Manager was saying. It was of no

slight importance to him, for this invitation from a man with whom he had never got on

very well was a sort of friendly overture and showed how important K. had become to the

Bank and how valuable his friendship or at least his neutrality had become to its second

highest official. The Assistant Manager had definitely humbled himself in giving this

invitation, even though he had merely dropped it casually while waiting at the telephone to

get a connection. Yet K. had to humble the man a second time, for he said: "Thanks very

much. But I'm sorry I have no time on Sunday, I have a previous engagement." "A pity,"

said the Assistant Manager, turning to speak into the telephone, which had just been

connected. It was not a short conversation, but in his confusion K. remained standing the whole time beside the instrument. Not till the Assistant Manager had rung off did he start

out of his reverie in some alarm and say, to excuse his aimless loitering: "I have just been

rung up and asked to go somewhere, but they forgot to tell me at what time." "Well, you

can ring up and ask," said the Assistant Manager. "It isn't so important as all that," said K.,

though in saying so he crippled still further his first lame excuse. The Assistant Manager,

turning to go, went on making remarks about other topics. K. forced himself to answer, but

what he was really thinking was that it would be best to go to the address at nine o'clock on

Sunday morning, since that was the hour at which all the law courts started their business

on weekdays.

Sunday was dull. K. was tired, for he had stayed late at his restaurant the night before

because of a celebration; he had nearly overslept. In a great hurry, without taking time to

think or co-ordinate the plans which he had drawn up during the week, he dressed and

rushed off, without his breakfast, to the suburb which had been mentioned to him.

Strangely enough, though he had little time to study passers-by, he caught sight of the

three clerks already involved in his case: Rabensteiner, Kullich, and Kaminer. The first

two were journeying in a streetcar which crossed in front of him, but Kaminer was sitting

on the terrace of a café, and bent inquisitively over the railing just as K. passed. All three

were probably staring after him and wondering where their chief was rushing off to; a sort

of defiance had kept K. from taking a vehicle to his destination, he loathed the thought of

chartering anyone, even the most casual stranger, to help him along in this case of his, also

he did not want to be beholden to anyone or to initiate anyone even remotely in his affairs,

and last of all he had no desire to belittle himself before the Court of Inquiry by a too

scrupulous punctuality. Nevertheless he was hurrying fast, so as to arrive by nine o'clock if

possible, although he had not even been required to appear at any specified time.

He had thought that the house would be recognizable even at a distance by some sign

which his imagination left unspecified, or by some unusual commotion before the door.



But Juliusstrasse, where the house was said to be and at whose end he stopped for a

moment, displayed on both sides houses almost exactly alike, high gray tenements

inhabited by poor people. This being Sunday morning, most of the windows were

occupied, men in shirt-sleeves were leaning there smoking or holding small children

cautiously and tenderly on the window-ledges. Other windows were piled high with

bedding, above which the disheveled head of a woman would appear for a moment. People

were shouting to one another across the street; one shout just above K.'s head caused great

laughter. Down the whole length of the street at regular intervals, below the level of the

pavement, there were little general grocery shops, to which short flights of steps led down.

Women were thronging into and out of these shops or gossiping on the steps outside. A

fruit hawker who was crying his wares to the people in the windows above, progressing

almost as inattentively as K. himself, almost knocked K. down with his pushcart. A

phonograph which had seen long service in a better quarter of the town began stridently to

murder a tune. K. penetrated deeper into the street, slowly, as if he had now abundant time, or as if the

Examining Magistrate might be leaning from one of the windows with every opportunity

of observing that he was on the way. It was a little after nine o'clock. The house was quite

far along the street, it was of unusual extent, the main entrance was particularly high and

wide. It was clearly a service entrance for trucks, the locked doors of various warehouses

surrounded the courtyard and displayed the names of firms some of which were known to

K. from the Bank ledgers. Against his usual habit, he studied these external appearances

with close attention and remained standing for a little while in the entrance to the

courtyard. Near him a barefooted man was sitting on a crate reading a newspaper. Two

lads were see-sawing on a hand-barrow. A sickly young girl was standing at a pump in her

dressing-jacket and gazing at K. while the water poured into her bucket. In one corner of

the courtyard a line was stretched between two windows, where washing was already

being hung up to dry. A man stood below superintending the work with an occasional

shout.

K. turned toward the stairs to make his way up to the Court of Inquiry, but then came

to a standstill again, for in addition to this staircase lie could see in the courtyard three

other separate flights of stairs and besides these a little passage at the other end which

seemed to lead into a second courtyard. He was annoyed that he had not been given more

definite information about the room, these people showed a strange negligence or

indifference in their treatment of him, he intended to tell them so very positively and

clearly. Finally, however, he climbed the first stairs and his mind played in retrospect with

the saying of the warder Willem that an attraction existed between the Law and guilt, from

which it should really follow that the Court of Inquiry must abut on the particular flight of

stairs which K. happened to choose.

On his way up he disturbed many children who were playing on the stairs and looked

at him angrily as he strode through their ranks. "If I ever come here again, he told himself,

"I must either bring sweets to cajole them with or else a stick to beat them." Just before he

reached the first floor he had actually to wait for a moment until a marble came to rest, two

children with the lined, pinched faces of adult rogues holding him meanwhile by his

trousers; if he had shaken them off he must have hurt them, and he feared their outcries.

His real search began on the first floor. As he could not inquire for the Court of

Inquiry he invented a joiner called Lanz the name came into his mind because Frau

Grubach's nephew, the Captain, was called Lanz and so he began to inquire at all the doors

if a joiner called Lanz lived there, so as to get a chance to look into the rooms. It turned

out, however, that that was quite possible without further ado, for almost all the doors

stood open, with children running out and in. Most of the flats, too, consisted of one small

single-windowed room in which cooking was going on. Many of the women were holding

babies in one arm and working over the stove with the arm that was left free. Half-grown

girls who seemed to be dressed in nothing but an apron kept busily rushing about. In all the

rooms the beds were still occupied, sick people were lying in them, or men who had not

wakened yet, or others who were resting there in their clothes. At the doors which were shut K. knocked and asked if a joiner called Lanz lived there. Generally a woman opened,

listened to his question, and then turned to someone in the room, who thereupon rose from

the bed. "The gentleman's asking if a joiner called Lanz lives here." "A joiner called

Lanz?" asked the man from the bed. "Yes," said K., though it was beyond question that the

Court of Inquiry did not sit here and his inquiry was therefore superfluous. Many seemed

convinced that it was highly important for K. to find the joiner Lanz, they took a long time

to think it over, suggested some joiner who, however, was not called Lanz, or a name

which had some quite distant resemblance to Lanz, or inquired of their neighbors, or

escorted K. to a door some considerable distance away, where they fancied such a man

might be living as a lodger, or where there was someone who could give better information

than they could. In the end K. scarcely needed to ask at all, for in this way he was

conducted over the whole floor. He now regretted his plan, which at first had seemed so

practical. As he was approaching the fifth floor he decided to give up the search, said goodbye

to a friendly young workman who wanted to conduct him farther, and descended again.

But then the uselessness of the whole expedition filled him with exasperation, he went up

the stairs once more and knocked at the first door he came to on the fifth story. The first

thing he saw in the little room was a great pendulum clock which already pointed to ten.

"Does a joiner called Lanz live here?" he asked. "Please go through," said a young woman

with sparkling black eyes, who was washing children's clothes in a tub, and she pointed

with her damp hand to the open door of the next room.

K. felt as though he were entering a meeting-hall. A crowd of the most variegated

people -- nobody troubled about the newcomer -- filled a medium-sized two-windowed

room, which just below the roof was surrounded by a gallery, also quite packed, where the

people were able to stand only in a bent posture with their heads and backs knocking

against the ceiling. K., feeling the air too thick for him, stepped out again and said to the

young woman, who seemed to have misunderstood him: "I asked for a joiner, a man called

Lanz." "I know," said the woman, "just go right in." K. might not have obeyed if she had

not come up to him, grasped the handle of the door, and said: "I must shut this door after

you, nobody else must come in." "Very sensible," said K., "but the room is surely too full

already." However, he went in again. Between two men who were talking together just

inside the door -- the one was making with both outstretched hands a gesture as if paying

out money while the other was looking him sharply in the eye -- a hand reached out and

seized K. It belonged to a little red-cheeked lad. "Come along, come along," he said. K. let

himself be led off, it seemed that in the confused, swarming crowd a slender path was kept

free after all, possibly separating two different factions; in favor of this supposition was the

fact that immediately to right and left of him K. saw scarcely one face looking his way, but

only the backs of people who were addressing their words and gestures to the members of

their own party. Most of them were dressed in black, in old, long, and loosely hanging

Sunday coats. These clothes were the only thing that baffled K., otherwise he would have

taken the gathering for a local political meeting. \*

At the other end of the hall, toward which K. was being led, there stood on a low and somewhat crowded platform a little table, set at a slant, and behind it, near the very edge of

the platform, sat a fat little wheezing man who was talking with much merriment to a man

sprawling just behind him with his elbow on the back of the chair and his legs crossed. The

fat little man now and then flung his arms into the air, as if he were caricaturing someone.

The lad who was escorting K. found it difficult to announce his presence. Twice he stood

on tiptoe and tried to say something, without being noticed by the man up above. Not till

one of the people on the platform pointed out the lad did the man turn to him and bend

down to hear his faltered words. Then he drew out his watch and with a quick glance at K.,

"You should have been here an hour and five minutes ago," he said. K. was about to

answer, but had no time to do so, for scarcely had the man spoken when a general growl of

disapproval followed in the right half of the hall. "You should have been here an hour and

five minutes ago," repeated the man in a raised voice, casting another quick glance into the



body of the hail. Immediately the muttering grew stronger and took some time to subside,

even though the man said nothing more. Then it became much quieter in the hall than at

K.'s entrance. Only the people in the gallery still kept up their comments. As far as one

could make out in the dimness, dust, and reek, they seemed to be worse dressed than the

people below. Some had brought cushions with them, which they put between their heads

and the ceiling, to keep their heads from getting bruised.

K. made up his mind to observe rather than speak, consequently he offered no defense

of his alleged lateness in arriving and merely said: "Whether I am late or not, I am here

now." A burst of applause followed, once more from the right side of the hail. "These

people are easy to win over," thought K., disturbed only by the silence in the left half of

the room, which lay just behind him and from which only one or two isolated handclaps

had come. He considered what he should say to win over the whole of the audience once

and for all, or if that were not possible, at least to win over most of them for the time

being.

"Yes," said the man, "but I am no longer obliged to hear you now" -- once more the

muttering arose, this time unmistakable in its import, for, silencing the audience with a

wave of the hand, the man went on: "yet I shall make an exception for once on this

occasion. But such a delay must not occur again. And now step forward." Someone

jumped down from the platform to make room for K., who climbed on to it. He stood

crushed against the table, the crowd behind him was so great that he had to brace himself

to keep from knocking the Examining Magistrate's table and perhaps the Examining

Magistrate himself off the platform.

But the Examining Magistrate did not seem to worry, he sat quite comfortably in his

chair and after a few final words to the man behind him took up a small notebook, the only

object lying on the table. It was like an ancient school exercise-book, grown dog-eared

from much thumbing. "Well, then," said the Examining Magistrate, turning over the leaves

and addressing K. with an air of authority, "you are a house painter?" "No," said K., "I'm

the chief clerk of a large Bank." This answer evoked such a hearty outburst of laughter

from the Right party that K. had to laugh too. People doubled up with their hands on their knees and shook as if in spasms of coughing. There were even a few guffaws from the

gallery. The Examining Magistrate, now indignant, and having apparently no authority to

control the people in the body of the hall, proceeded to vent his displeasure on those in the

gallery, springing up and scowling at them till his eyebrows, hitherto inconspicuous,

contracted in great black bushes above his eyes.

The Left half of the hall, however, was still as quiet as ever, the people there stood in

rows facing the platform and listened unmoved to what was going on up there as well as to

the noise in the rest of the hall, indeed they actually suffered some of their members to

initiate conversations with the other faction. These people of the Left party, who were not

so numerous as the others, might in reality be just as unimportant, but the composure of

their bearing made them appear of more consequence. As K. began his speech he was

convinced that he was actually representing their point of view.

"This question of yours, Sir, about my being a house painter -- or rather, not a

question, you simply made a statement -- is typical of the whole character of this trial that

is being foisted on me. You may object that it is not a trial at all; you are quite right, for it

is only a trial if I recognize it as such. But for the moment I do recognize it, on grounds of

compassion, as it were. One can't regard it except with compassion, if one is to regard it at

all. I do not say that your procedure is contemptible, but I should like to present that

epithet to you for your private consumption." K. stopped and looked down into the hall. He

had spoken sharply, more sharply than he had intended, but with every justification. His

words should have merited applause of some kind, yet all was still, the audience were

clearly waiting intently for what was to follow; perhaps in that silence an outbreak was

preparing which would put an end to the whole thing. K. was annoyed when the door at the

end of the hall opened at that moment, admitting the young washerwoman, who seemed to

have finished her work; she distracted some of the audience in spite of all the caution with

which she entered. But the Examining Magistrate himself rejoiced K.'s heart, for he

seemed to be quite dismayed by the speech. Until now he had been on his feet, for he had

been surprised by K.'s speech as he got up to rebuke the gallery. In this pause he resumed

his seat, very slowly, as if he wished his action to escape remark. Presumably to calm his

spirit, he turned over the notebook again.

"That won't help you much," K. continued, "your very notebook, Sir, confirms what I

say." Emboldened by the mere sound of his own cool words in that strange assembly, K.

simply snatched the notebook from the Examining Magistrate and held it up with the tips

of his fingers, as if it might soil his hands, by one of the middle pages, so that the closely

written, blotted, yellow-edged leaves hung down on either side. "These are the Examining

Magistrate's records," he said, letting it fall on the table again. "You can continue reading it

at your ease, Herr Examining Magistrate, I really don't fear this ledger of yours though it is

a closed book to me, for I would not touch it except with my finger tips and cannot even

take it in my hand." It could only be a sign of deep humiliation, or must at least be

interpreted as such, that the Examining Magistrate now took up the notebook where it had

fallen on the table, tried to put it to rights again, and once more began to read it. The eyes of the people in the first row were so tensely fixed upon K. that for a while

he stood silently looking down at them. They were without exception elderly men, some of

them with white beards. Could they possibly be the influential men, the men who would

carry the whole assembly with them, and did they refuse to be shocked out of the

impassivity into which they had sunk ever since he began his speech, even although he had

publicly humiliated the Examining Magistrate?

"What has happened to me," K. went on, rather more quietly than before, trying at the

same time to read the faces in the first row, which gave his speech a somewhat

disconnected effect, "what has happened to me is only a single instance and as such of no

great importance, especially as I do not take it very seriously, but it is representative of a

misguided policy which is being directed against many other people as well. It is for these

that I take up my stand here, not for myself."

He had involuntarily raised his voice. Someone in the audience clapped his hands

high in the air and shouted: "Bravo! Why not? Bravo! And bravo again!" A few men in the

first row pulled at their beards, but none turned round at this interruption. K., too, did not

attach any importance to it, yet felt cheered nevertheless; he no longer considered it

necessary to get applause from everyone, he would be quite pleased if he could make the

audience start thinking about the question and win a man here and there through

conviction.

"I have no wish to shine as an orator," said K., having come to this conclusion, "nor

could I if I wished. The Examining Magistrate, no doubt, is much the better speaker, it is

part of his vocation. All I desire is the public ventilation of a public grievance. Listen to

me. Some ten days ago I was arrested, in a manner that seems ridiculous even to myself,

though that is immaterial at the moment. I was seized in bed before I could get up, perhaps -

- it is not unlikely, considering the Examining Magistrate's statement -- perhaps they had

orders to arrest some house painter who is just as innocent as I am, only they hit on me.

The room next to mine was requisitioned by two coarse warders. If I had been a dangerous

bandit they could not have taken more careful precautions. These warders, moreover, were

degenerate ruffians, they deafened my ears with their gabble, they tried to induce me to

bribe them, they attempted to get my clothes and underclothes from me under dishonest

pretexts, they asked me to give them money ostensibly to bring me some breakfast after

they had brazenly eaten my own breakfast under my eyes. But that was not all. I was led

into a third room to confront the Inspector. It was the room of a lady whom I deeply

respect, and I had to look on while this room was polluted, yes, polluted, on my account

but not by any fault of mine, through the presence of these warders and this Inspector. It

was not easy for me to remain calm. I succeeded, however, and I asked the Inspector with

the utmost calm if he were here, he would have to substantiate that -- why I had been

arrested. And what was the answer of this Inspector, whom I can see before me now as lie



l lounged in a chair belonging to the lady I have mentioned, like an embodiment of crass

arrogance? Gentlemen, he answered in effect nothing at all, perhaps he really knew nothing; he had arrested me and that was enough. But that is not all, he had brought three

minor employees of my Bank into the lady's roomy who amused themselves by fingering

and disarranging certain photographs, the property of the lady. The presence of these

employees had another object as well, of course, they were expected, like my landlady and

her maid, to spread the news of my arrest, damage my public reputation, and in particular

shake my position in the Bank. Well, this expectation has entirely failed of its success,

even my landlady, a quite simple person -- I pronounce her name in all honor, she is called

Frau Grubach -- even Frau Grubach has been intelligent enough to recognize that an arrest

such as this is no more worth taking seriously than some wild prank committed by stray

urchins at the street corners. I repeat, the whole matter has caused me nothing but some

unpleasantness and passing annoyance, but might it not have had worse consequences?"

When K. stopped at this point and glanced at the silent Examining Magistrate, he

thought he could see him catching someone's eye in the audience, as if giving a sign. K.

smiled and said: "The Examining Magistrate sitting here beside me has just given one of

you a secret sign. So there are some among you who take your instructions from up here. I

do not know whether the sign was meant to evoke applause or hissing, and now that I have

divulged the matter prematurely I deliberately give up all hope of ever learning its real

significance. It is a matter of complete indifference to me, and I publicly empower the

Examining Magistrate to address his hired agents in so many words, instead of making

secret signs to them, to say at the proper moment: Hiss now, or alternatively: Clap now."

The Examining Magistrate kept fidgeting on his chair with embarrassment or

impatience. The man behind him to whom he had been talking bent over him again, either

to encourage him or to give him some particular counsel. Down below, the people in the

audience were talking in low voices but with animation. The two factions who had seemed

previously to be irreconcilable, were now drifting together, some individuals were pointing

their fingers at K., others at the Examining Magistrate. The fuggy atmosphere in the room

was unbearable, it actually prevented one from seeing the people at the other end. It must

have been particularly inconvenient for the spectators in the gallery, who were forced to

question the members of the audience in a low voice, with fearful sideglances at the

Examining Magistrate, to find out what was happening. The answers were given as

furtively, the informant generally putting his hand to his mouth to muffle his words.

"I have nearly finished," said K., striking the table with his fist, since there was no

bell. At the shock of the impact the beads of the Examining Magistrate and his adviser

started away from each other for a moment. "I am quite detached from this affair, I can

therefore judge it calmly, and you, that is to say if you take this alleged court of justice at

all seriously, will find it to your great advantage to listen to me. But I beg you to postpone

until later any comments you may wish to exchange on what I have to say, for I am

pressed for time and must leave very soon."

At once there was silence, so completely did K. already dominate the meeting. The

audience no longer shouted confusedly as at the beginning, they did not even applaud, they seemed already convinced or on the verge of being convinced.

"There can be no doubt --" said K., quite softly, for he was elated by the breathless

attention of the meeting; in that stillness a subdued hum was audible which was more

exciting than the wildest applause -- "there can be no doubt that behind all the actions of

this court of justice, that is to say in my case, behind my arrest and today's interrogation,

there is a great organization at work. An organization which not only employs corrupt

warders, oafish Inspectors, and Examining Magistrates of whom the best that can be said is

that they recognize their own limitations, but also has at its disposal a judicial hierarchy of

high, indeed of the highest rank, with an indispensable and numerous retinue of servants,

clerks, police, and other assistants, perhaps even hangmen, I do not shrink from that word.

And the significance of this great organization, gentlemen? It consists in this, that innocent

persons are accused of guilt, and senseless proceedings are put in motion against them,

mostly without effect, it is true, as in my own case. But considering the senselessness of

the whole, how is it possible for the higher ranks to prevent gross corruption in their

agents? It is impossible. Even the highest Judge in this organization cannot resist it. So the

warders try to steal the clothes off the bodies of the people they arrest, the Inspectors break

into strange houses, and innocent men, instead of being fairly examined, are humiliated in

the presence of public assemblies. The warders mentioned certain depots where the

property of prisoners is kept; I should like to see these depots where the hard-earned

property of arrested men is left to rot, or at least what remains of it after thieving officials

have helped themselves."

Here K. was interrupted by a shriek from the end of the hail; he peered from beneath

his hand to see what was happening, for the reek of the room and the dim light together

made a whitish dazzle of fog. It was the washer-woman, whom K. had recognized as a

potential cause of disturbance from the moment of her entrance. Whether she was at fault

now or not, one could not tell. All K. could see was that a man had drawn her into a corner

by the door and was clasping her in his arms. \* Yet it was not she who had uttered the

shriek but the man; his mouth was wide open and he was gazing up at the ceiling. A little

circle had formed round them, the gallery spectators near by seemed to be delighted that

the seriousness which K. had introduced into the proceedings should be dispelled in this

manner. K.'s first impulse was to rush across the room, he naturally imagined that

everybody would be anxious to have order restored and the offending couple at least

ejected from the meeting, but the first rows of the audience remained quite impassive, no

one stirred and no one would let him through. On the contrary they actually obstructed

him, someone's hand -- he had no time to turn round -- seized him from behind by the

collar, old men stretched out their arms to bar his way, and by this time K. was no longer

thinking about the couple, it seemed to him as if his freedom were being threatened, as if

he were being arrested in earnest, and he sprang recklessly down from the platform. Now

he stood eye to eye with the crowd. Had he been mistaken in these people?  
Had he

overestimated the effectiveness of his speech? Had they been disguising  
their real opinions

while he spoke, and now that he had come to the conclusion of his speech  
were they weary at last of pretense? What faces these were around him!  
Their little black eyes darted

furtively from side to side, their beards were stiff and brittle, and to take  
hold of them

would be like clutching bunches of claws rather than beards. But under the  
beards -- and

this was K.'s real discovery -- badges of various sizes and colors gleamed  
on their coatcollars.

They all wore these badges, so far as he could see. They were all  
colleagues, these

ostensible parties of the Right and the Left, and as he turned round suddenly  
he saw the

same badges on the coat-collar of the Examining Magistrate, who was  
sitting quietly

watching the scene with his hands on his knees. "So !" cried K., flinging his  
arms in the

air, his sudden enlightenment had to break out, "every man jack of you is an  
official, I see,

you are yourselves the corrupt agents of whom I have been speaking, you've  
all come

rushing here to listen and nose out what you can about me, making a  
pretense of party

divisions, and half of you applauded merely to lead me on, you wanted some practice in

fooling an innocent man. Well, much good I hope it's done you, for either you have merely

gathered some amusement from the fact that I expected you to defend the innocent, or else -

- keep off or I'll strike you," cried K. to a trembling old man who had pushed quite close to

him -- "or else you have really learned a thing or two. And I wish you joy of your trade."

He hastily seized his hat, which lay near the edge of the table, and amid universal silence,

the silence of complete stupefaction, if nothing else, pushed his way to the door. But the

Examining Magistrate seemed to have been still quicker than K., for he was waiting at the

door. "A moment," he said. K. paused but kept his eyes on the door, not on the Examining

Magistrate; his hand was already on the latch. "I merely wanted to point out," said the

Examining Magistrate, "that today -- you may not yet have become aware of the fact --

today you have flung away with your own hand all the advantages which an interrogation

invariably confers on an accused man." K. laughed, still looking at the door. "You



scoundrels, I'll spare you future interrogations," he shouted, opened the door, and hurried

down the stairs. Behind him rose the buzz of animated discussion, the audience had

apparently come to life again and were analyzing the situation like expert students. Chapter 3

In the Empty Courtroom / The Student / The Offices

DURING the next week K. waited day after day for a new summons, he would not believe

that his refusal to be interrogated had been taken literally, and when no appointment was

made by Saturday evening, he assumed that he was tacitly expected to report himself again

at the same address and at the same time. So he betook himself there on Sunday morning,

and this time went straight up through the passages and stairways; a few people who

remembered him greeted him from their doors, but he no longer needed to inquire of

anybody and soon came to the right door. It opened at once to his knock, and without even

turning his head to look at the woman, who remained standing beside the door, he made

straight for the adjoining room. "There's no sitting today," said the woman. "Why is there

no sitting?" he asked; he could not believe it. But the woman convinced him by herself

opening the door of the next room. It was really empty and in its emptiness looked even

more sordid than on the previous Sunday. On the table, which still stood on the platform as

before, several hooks were lying. "May I glance at the books?" asked K., not out of any

particular curiosity, but merely that his visit here might not be quite pointless. "No," said

the woman, shutting the door again, "that isn't allowed. The books belong to the

Examining Magistrate." "I see," said K., nodding, "these books are probably law books,

and it is an essential part of the justice dispensed here that you should be condemned not

only in innocence but also in ignorance." "That must be it," said the woman, who had not

quite understood him. "Well, in that case I had better go again," said K. "Shall I give the

Examining Magistrate a message?" asked the woman. "Do you know him?" asked K. "Of

course," replied the woman, "my husband is an usher, you see." Only then did K. notice

that the anteroom, which had contained nothing but a washtub last Sunday, now formed a

fully furnished living room. The woman remarked his surprise and said:  
"Yes, we have

free house-room here, but we must clear the room on the days when the  
Court is sitting.

My husband's post has many disadvantages." "I'm not so much surprised at  
the room," said

K., looking at her severely, "as at the fact that you're married." "Perhaps  
you're hinting at

what happened during the last sitting, when I caused a disturbance while  
you were

speaking," said the woman. "Of course I am," said K. "It's an old story by  
this time, and

almost forgotten, but at the moment it made me quite furious. And now you  
say yourself

that you're a married woman." "It didn't do you any harm to have your  
speech interrupted;

what you said made a bad enough impression, to judge from the discussion  
afterwards."

"That may be," said K., evading that issue, "but it does not excuse you." "I  
stand excused

in the eyes of everyone who knows me," said the woman. "The man you  
saw embracing

me has been persecuting me for a long time. I may not be a temptation to  
most men, but I

am to him. There's no way of keeping him off, even my husband has grown  
reconciled to it

now; if he isn't to lose his job he must put up with it, for that man you saw is one of the students and will probably rise to great power yet. He's always after me, he was here today,

just before you came." "It is all on a par," said K., "it doesn't surprise me."  
"You are

anxious to improve things here, I think," said the woman slowly and watchfully, as if she

were saying something which was risky both to her and to K., "I guessed that from your

speech, which personally I liked very much. Though, of course, I only heard part of it, I

missed the beginning and I was down on the floor with the student while you were

finishing. It's so horrible here," she said after a pause, taking K.'s hand. "Do you think

you'll manage to improve things?" K. smiled and caressed her soft hands.  
"Actually," he

said, "it isn't my place to improve things here, as you put it, and if you were to tell the

Examining Magistrate so, let us say, he would either laugh at you or have you punished.

As a matter of fact, I should never have dreamed of interfering of my own free will, and

shouldn't have lost an hour's sleep over the need for reforming the machinery of justice

here. But the fact that I am supposed to be under arrest forces me to intervene -- I am under

arrest, you know -- to protect my own interests. But if I can help you in any way at the

same time, I shall be very glad, of course. And not out of pure altruism, either, for you in

turn might be able to help me." "How could I do that?" asked the woman. "By letting me

look at the books on the table there, for instance." "But of course!" cried the woman,

dragging him hastily after her. They were old dog-eared volumes, the cover of one was

almost completely split down the middle, the two halves were held together by mere

threads. "How dirty everything is here!" said K., shaking his head, and the woman had to

wipe away the worst of the dust with her apron before K. would put out his hand to touch

the books. He opened the first of them and found an indecent picture. A man and a woman

were sitting naked on a sofa, the obscene intention of the draftsman was evident enough,

yet his skill was so small that nothing emerged from the picture save the all-too-solid

figures of a man and a woman sitting rigidly upright, and because of the bad perspective,

apparently finding the utmost difficulty even in turning toward each other. K. did not look

at any of the other pages, but merely glanced at the title page of the second book, it was a

novel entitled: How Grete Was Plagued by Her Husband Hams. "These are the law books

that are studied here," said K. "These are the men who are supposed to sit in judgment on

me." "I'll help you," said the woman. "Would you like me to?" "Could you really do that

without getting yourself into trouble? You told me a moment ago that your husband is

quite at the mercy of the higher officials." "I want to help you, all the same," said the

woman. "Come, let us talk it over. Don't bother about the danger to me. I only fear danger

when I want to fear it. Come." She settled herself on the edge of the platform and made

room for him beside her. "You have lovely dark eyes," she said, after they had sat down,

looking up into K.'s face, "I've been told that I have lovely eyes too, but yours are far

lovelier. I was greatly struck by you as soon as I saw you, the first time you came here.

And it was because of you that I slipped later into the courtroom, a thing I never do

otherwise and which, in a manner of speaking, I am actually forbidden to do." "So this is

all it amounts to," thought K., "she's offering herself to me, she's corrupt like the rest of

them, she's tired of the officials here, which is understandable enough, and accosts any

stranger who takes her fancy with compliments about his eyes." And K. rose to his feet as

if he had uttered his thoughts aloud and sufficiently explained his position. "I don't think that could help me," he said; "to help me effectively one would need connections with the

higher officials. But I'm sure you know only the petty subordinates that swarm round here.

You must know them quite well and could get them to do a lot, I don't doubt, but the

utmost that they could do would have no effect whatever on the final result of the case.

And you would simply have alienated some of your friends. I don't want that. Keep your

friendship with these people, for it seems to me that you need it. I say this with regret,

since to make some return for your compliment, I must confess that I like you too,

especially when you gaze at me with such sorrowful eyes, as you are doing now, though I

assure you there's no reason whatever for it. Your place is among the people I have to

fight, but you're quite at home there, you love this student, no doubt, or if you don't love

him at least you prefer him to your husband. It's easy to tell that from what you say." "No,"

she cried without getting up but merely catching hold of K.'s hand, which he did not

withdraw quickly enough. "You mustn't go away yet, you mustn't go with mistaken ideas

about me. Could you really bring yourself to go away like that? Am I really of so little

account in your eyes that you won't even do me the kindness of staying for a little longer?"

"You misunderstand me," said K., sitting down, "if you really want me to stay I'll stay with

pleasure, I have time enough; I came here expecting to find the Court in session. All that I

meant was merely to beg you not to do anything for me in this case of mine. But that

needn't offend you when you consider that I don't care at all what the outcome of the case

is, and that I would only laugh at it if I were sentenced. Assuming, that is, that the case will

ever come to a proper conclusion, which I very much doubt. Indeed, I fancy that it has

probably been dropped already or will soon be dropped, through the laziness or the

forgetfulness or it may be even through the fears of those who are responsible for it. Of



course it's possible that they will make a show of carrying it on, in the hope of getting

money out of me, but they needn't bother, I can tell you now, for I shall never bribe

anyone. That's something you could really do for me, however; you could inform the

Examining Magistrate, or anyone who could be depended on to spread the news, that

nothing will induce me to bribe these officials, not even any of the artifices in which they

are doubtless so ingenious. The attempt would be quite hopeless, you can tell them that

frankly. But perhaps they have come to that conclusion already, and even if they haven't, I

don't much mind whether they get the information or not. It would merely save them some

trouble and me, of course, some unpleasantness, but I should gladly endure any

unpleasantness that meant a setback for them. And I shall take good care to see that it does.

By the way, do you really know the Examining Magistrate?" "Of course," said the woman.

"He was the first one I thought of when I offered you my help. I didn't know that he was

only a petty official, but as you say so it must naturally be true. All the same, I fancy that

the reports he sends up to the higher officials have some influence. And he writes out so

many reports. You say that the officials are lazy, but that certainly doesn't apply to all of

them, particularly to the Examining Magistrate, he's always writing. Last Sunday, for

instance, the session lasted till late in the evening. All the others left, but the Examining

Magistrate stayed on in the courtroom, I had to bring a lamp for him, I only had a small

kitchen lamp, but that was all he needed and he began to write straight away. In the

meantime my husband came home, he was off duty on that particular Sunday, we carried back our furniture, set our room to rights again, then some neighbors arrived, we talked on

by candlelight, to tell the truth we simply forgot the Examining Magistrate and went to

bed. Suddenly, in the middle of the night, it must have been far into the night by then, I

woke up, the Examining Magistrate was standing beside our bed shielding the lamp with

his hand to keep the light from falling on my husband, a needless precaution, for my

husband sleeps so soundly that not even the light would have wakened him. I was so

startled that I almost cried out, but the Examining Magistrate was very kind, warned me to

be careful, whispered to me that he had been writing till then, that he had come to return

the lamp, and that he would never forget the picture I had made lying asleep in bed. I only

tell you this to show that the Examining Magistrate is kept really busy writing reports,

especially about you, for your interrogation was certainly one of the main items in the two

days' session. Such long reports as that surely can't be quite unimportant. But besides that

you can guess from what happened that the Examining Magistrate is beginning to take an

interest in me, and that at this early stage -- for he must have noticed me then for the first

time -- I could have great influence with him. And by this time I have other proofs that he

is anxious to win my favor. Yesterday he sent me a pair of silk stockings through the

student, who works with him and whom he is very friendly with, making out that it was a

reward for cleaning the courtroom, but that was only an excuse, for to do that is only my

duty and my husband is supposed to be paid for it. They're beautiful stockings, look" -- she

stretched out her legs, pulled her skirts above her knees, and herself contemplated the

stockings -- "they're beautiful stockings, but too fine, all the same, and not suitable for a

woman like me."

Suddenly she broke off, laid her hand on K.'s hand as if to reassure him, and said:

"Hush, Bertold is watching us." K. slowly raised his eyes. In the door of the courtroom a

young man was standing; he was small, his legs were slightly bowed, and he strove to add

dignity to his appearance by wearing a short, straggling reddish beard, which he was

always fingering. K. stared at him with interest, this was the first student of the mysterious

jurisprudence whom he had encountered, as it were, on human terms, a man, too, who

would presumably attain to one of the higher official positions some day. The student,

however, seemed to take not the slightest notice of K., he merely made a sign to the

woman with one finger, which he withdrew for a moment from his beard, and went over to

the window. The woman bent over K. and whispered: "Don't be angry with me, please

don't think badly of me, I must go to him now, and he's a dreadful-looking creature, just

see what bandy legs he has. But I'll come back in a minute and then I'll go with you if

you'll take me with you, I'll go with you wherever you like, you can do with me what you

please, I'll be glad if I can only get out of here for a long time, and I wish it could be

forever." She gave K.'s hand a last caress, jumped up, and ran to the window. Despite

himself K.'s hand reached out after hers in the empty air. The woman really attracted him,

and after mature reflection he could find no valid reason why he should not yield to that

attraction. He dismissed without difficulty the fleeting suspicion that she might be trying to

lay a trap for him on the instructions of the Court. In what way could she entrap him?

Wasn't he still free enough to flout the authority of this Court once and for all, at least as far as it concerned him? Could he not trust himself to this trifling extent? And her offer of

help had sounded sincere and was probably not worthless. And probably there could be no

more fitting revenge on the Examining Magistrate and his henchmen than to wrest this

woman from them and take her himself. Then some night the Examining Magistrate, after

long and arduous labor on his lying reports about K., might come to the woman's bed and

find it empty. Empty because she had gone off with K., because the woman now standing

in the window, that supple, voluptuous warm body under the coarse heavy, dark dress,

belonged to K. and to K. alone.

After arguing himself in this way out of his suspicions, he began to feel that the

whispered conversation in the window was going on too long, and started knocking on the

table with his knuckles and then with his fist. The student glanced briefly at K. across the

woman's shoulder, but did not let himself be put out, indeed moved closer to her and put

his arms around her. She drooped her head as if attentively listening to him, and as she did

so he kissed her loudly on the throat without at all interrupting his remarks. In this action

K. saw confirmed the tyranny which the student exercised over the woman, as she had

complained, and he sprang to his feet and began to pace up and down the room. With

occasional side-glances at the student he meditated how to get rid of him as quickly as

possible, and so it was not unwelcome to him when the fellow, obviously annoyed by his

walking up and down, which had turned by now into an angry trampling, said: "If you're so

impatient, you can go away. There was nothing to hinder your going long ago, nobody

would have missed you. In fact, it was your duty to go away, and as soon as I came in too,

and as fast as your legs could carry you." There was intense rage in these words, but there

was also the insolence of a future official of the Court addressing a displeasing prisoner. K.

stepped up quite close to the student and said with a smile: "I am impatient, that is true, but

the easiest way to relieve my impatience would be for you to leave us. Yet if by any

chance you have come here to study -- I hear that you're a student -- I'll gladly vacate the

room and go away with this woman. I fancy you've a long way to go yet in your studies

before you can become a Judge. I admit I'm not very well versed in the niceties of your

legal training, but I assume that it doesn't consist exclusively in learning to make rude

remarks, at which you seem to have attained a shameless proficiency." "He shouldn't have

been allowed to run around at large," said the student, as if seeking to explain K.'s insulting

words to the woman. "It was a mistake, I told the Examining Magistrate that. He should at

least have been confined to his room between the interrogations. There are times when I

simply don't understand the Examining Magistrate." \* "What's the use of talking?" said

K., stretching out his hand to the woman. "Come along." "Ah, that's it," said the student,

"no, no, you don't get her," and with a strength which one would not have believed him

capable of he lifted her in one arm and, gazing up at her tenderly, ran, stooping a little

beneath his burden, to the door. A certain fear of K. was unmistakable in this action, and

yet he risked infuriating K. further by caressing and clasping the woman's arm with his free

hand. K. ran a few steps after him, ready to seize and if necessary to throttle him, when the

woman said: "It's no use, the Examining Magistrate has sent for me, I daren't go with you;

this little monster," she patted the student's face, "this little monster won't let me go." "And you don't want to be set free," cried K., laying his hand on the shoulder of the student, who

snapped at it with his teeth. "No," cried the woman, pushing K. away with both hands.

"No, no, you mustn't do that, what are you thinking of? It would be the ruin of me. Let him



alone, oh, please let him alone! He's only obeying the orders of the  
Examining Magistrate

and carrying me to him." "Then let him go, and as for you, I never want to  
see you again,"

said K., furious with disappointment, and he gave the student a punch in the  
back that

made him stumble for a moment, only to spring off more nimbly than ever  
out of relief that

he had not fallen. K. slowly walked after them, he recognized that this was  
the first

unequivocal defeat that he had received from these people. There was no  
reason, of course,

for him to worry about that, he had received the defeat only because he had  
insisted on

giving battle. While he stayed quietly at home and went about his ordinary  
vocations he

remained superior to all these people and could kick any of them out of his  
path. And he

pictured to himself the highly comic situation which would arise if, for  
instance, this

wretched student, this puffed-up whippersnapper, this bandy-legged beaver,  
had to kneel

by Elsa's bed some day wringing his hands and begging for favors. This  
picture pleased K.

so much that he decided, if ever the opportunity came, to take the student  
along to visit

Elsa.

Out of curiosity K. hurried to the door, he wanted to see where the woman was being

carried off to, for the student could scarcely bear her in his arms across the street. But the

journey was much shorter than that. Immediately opposite the door a flight of narrow

wooden stairs led, as it seemed, to a garret, it had a turning so that one could not see the

other end. The student was now carrying the woman up this stairway, very slowly, puffing

and groaning, for he was beginning to be exhausted. The woman waved her hand to K. as

he stood below, and shrugged her shoulders to suggest that she was not to blame for this

abduction, but very little regret could be read into that dumb show. K. looked at her

expressionlessly, as if she were a stranger, he was resolved not to betray to her either that

he was disappointed or even that he could easily get over any disappointment he felt.

The two had already vanished, yet K. still stood in the doorway. He was forced to the

conclusion that the woman not only had betrayed him, but also had lied in saying that she

was being carried to the Examining Magistrate. The Examining Magistrate surely could

not be sitting waiting in a garret. The little wooden stairway did not reveal anything, no

matter how long one regarded it. But K. noticed a small card pinned up beside it, and

crossing over he read in childish, unpracticed handwriting: "Law Court Offices upstairs."

So the Law Court offices were up in the attics of this tenement? That was not an

arrangement likely to inspire much respect, and for an accused man it was reassuring to

reckon how little money this Court could have at its disposal when it housed its offices in a

part of the building where the tenants, who themselves belonged to the poorest of the poor,

flung their useless lumber. Though, of course, the possibility was not to be ignored that the

money was abundant enough, but that the officials pocketed it before it could be used for

the purposes of justice. To judge from K.'s experience hitherto, that was indeed extremely

probable, yet if it were so, such disreputable practices, while certainly humiliating to an accused man, suggested more hope for him than a merely pauperized condition of the Law

Courts. Now K. could understand too why in the beginning they had been ashamed to

summon him into their attics and had chosen instead to molest him in his lodgings. And

how well-off K. was compared with the Magistrate, who had to sit in a garret, while K. had

a large room in the Bank with a waiting-room attached to it and could watch the busy life

of the city through his enormous plate-glass window. True, he drew no secondary income

from bribes or peculation and could not order his attendant to pick up a woman and carry

her to his room. But K. was perfectly willing to renounce these advantages, at least in this

life.

K. was still standing beside the card when a man came up from below, looked into the

room through the open door, from which he could also see the courtroom, and then asked

K. if he had seen a woman about anywhere. "You are the usher, aren't you?" asked K.

"Yes," said the man. "Oh, you're the defendant K., now I recognize you, you're welcome."

And he held out his hand to K., who had not expected that. "But no sitting was announced

for today," the usher went on, as K. remained silent. "I know," said K., gazing at the man's

civilian clothes, which displayed on the jacket, as the sole emblem of his office, two gilt

buttons in addition to the ordinary ones, gilt buttons that looked as if they had been

stripped from an old army coat. "I was speaking to your wife a moment ago. She's not here

now. The student has carried her up to the Examining Magistrate." "There you are," said

the usher, "they're always carrying her away from me. Today is Sunday too, I'm not

supposed to do any work, but simply to get me away from the place they sent me out on a

useless errand. And they took care not to send me too far away, so that I had some hopes

of being able to get back in time if I hurried. And there was I running as fast as I could,

shouting the message through the half-open door of the office I was sent to, nearly

breathless so that they could hardly make me out, and back again at top speed, and yet the

student was here before me, he hadn't so far to come, of course, he had only to cut down

that short wooden staircase from the attics. If my job were not at stake, I would have

squashed that student flat against the wall here long ago. Just beside this card. It's a daily

dream of mine. I see him squashed flat here, just a little above the floor, his arms wide, his

fingers spread, his bandy legs writhing in a circle, and splashes of blood all round. But so

far it's only been a dream." "Is there no other remedy?" asked K., smiling. "Not that I know

of," said the usher. "And now it's getting worse than ever, up till now he has been carrying

her off for his own pleasure, but now, as I've been expecting for a long time, I may say,

he's carrying her to the Examining Magistrate as well." "But isn't your wife to blame too?"

asked K.; he had to keep a grip of himself while asking this, he still felt so jealous. "But of

course," said the usher, "she's actually most to blame of all. She simply flung herself at

him. As for him, he runs after every woman he sees. In this building alone he's already

been thrown out of five flats he managed to insinuate himself into. And my wife is the bestlooking

woman in the whole tenement, and I'm in a position where I can't defend myself."

"If that's how things stand, then there's no help, it seems," said K. "And why not?" asked

the usher. "If he only got a good thrashing some time when he was after my wife -- he's a

coward, anyway -- he would never dare to do it again. But I can't thrash him, and nobody else will oblige me by doing it, for they're all afraid of him, he's too influential. Only a man

like you could do it." "But why a man like me?" asked K., in astonishment. "You're under

arrest, aren't you?" said the usher. "Yes," said K., "and that means I have all the more

reason to fear him, for though he may not be able to influence the outcome of the case, he

can probably influence the preliminary interrogations." "Yes, that's so," said the usher, as if

K.'s view of the matter were as self-evident as his own. "Yet as a rule all our cases are

foregone conclusions." "I am not of that opinion," said K., "but that needn't prevent me

from taking the student in hand." "I should be very grateful to you," said the usher rather

formally; he did not appear really to believe that his heart's desire could be fulfilled. "It

may be," K. went on, "that some more of your officials, probably all of them, deserve the

same treatment." "Oh, yes," said the usher, as if he were assenting to a commonplace. Then

he gave K. a confidential look, such as he had not yet ventured in spite of all his

friendliness, and added: "Everyone is always rebellious." But the conversation seemed to

have made him uneasy, all the same, for he broke it off by saying: "I must report upstairs

now. Would you like to come too?" "I have no business there," said K. "You can have a

look at the offices. Nobody will pay any attention to you." "Why, are they worth seeing?"

asked K. hesitatingly, but suddenly feeling a great desire to go. "Well," said the usher, "I

thought it might interest you." "Good," said K. at last, "I'll come with you." And he ran up

the stairs even more quickly than the usher.

On entering he almost stumbled, for behind the door there was an extra step. "They

don't show much consideration for the public," he said. "They show no consideration of

any kind," replied the usher. "Just look at this waiting-room." It was a long passage, a

lobby communicating by ill-fitting doors with the different offices on the floor. Although



there was no window to admit light, it was not entirely dark, for some of the offices were

not properly boarded off from the passage but had an open frontage of wooden rails,

reaching, however, to the roof, through which a little light penetrated and through which

one could see a few officials as well, some writing at their desks, and some standing close

to the rails peering through the interstices at the people in the lobby. There were only a few

people in the lobby, probably because it was Sunday. They made a very modest showing.

At almost regular intervals they were sitting singly along a row of wooden benches fixed

to either side of the passage. All of them were carelessly dressed, though to judge from the

expression of their faces, their bearing, the cut of their beards, and many almost

imperceptible little details, they obviously belonged to the upper classes. As there was no

hat-rack in the passage, they had placed their hats under the benches, in this probably

following each other's example. When those who were sitting nearest the door caught sight

of K. and the usher, they rose politely, followed in turn by their neighbors, who also

seemed to think it necessary to rise, so that everyone stood as the two men passed. They

did not stand quite erect, their backs remained bowed, their knees bent, they stood like

street beggars. K. waited for the usher, who kept slightly behind him, and said: "How

humbled they must be!" "Yes," said the usher, "these are the accused men, all of them are

defendants." "Indeed !" said K. "Then they're colleagues of mine." And he turned to the

nearest, a tall, slender, almost gray-haired man. "What are you waiting here for?" asked K. courteously. But this unexpected question confused the man, which was the more deeply

embarrassing as he was obviously a man of the world who would have known how to

comport himself anywhere else and would not lightly have renounced his natural

superiority. Yet in this place he did not know even how to reply to a simple question and

gazed at the others as if it were their duty to help him, as if no one could expect him to

answer should help not be forthcoming. Then the usher stepped up and said, to reassure the

man and encourage him: "This gentleman merely asked what you are waiting for. Come,

give him an answer." The familiar voice of the usher had its effect: "I'm waiting-" the man

started to say, but could get out no more. He had obviously begun by intending to make an

exact reply to the question, but did not know how to go on. Some of the other clients had

drifted up and now clustered round, and the usher said to them: "Off with you, keep the

passage clear." They drew back a little, but not to their former places. Meanwhile the man

had collected himself and actually replied with a faint smile: "A month ago I handed in

several affidavits concerning my case and I am waiting for the result." "You seem to put

yourself to a great deal of trouble," said K. "Yes," said the man, "for it is my case."

"Everyone doesn't think as you do," said K. "For example, I am under arrest too, but as

sure as I stand here I have neither put in any affidavit nor attempted anything whatever of

the kind. Do you consider such things necessary, then?" "I can't exactly say," replied the

man, once more deprived of all assurance; he evidently thought that K. was making fun of

him, and appeared to be on the point of repeating his first answer all over again for fear of

making a new mistake, but under K.'s impatient eye he merely said: "Anyhow, I have

handed in my affidavits." "Perhaps you don't believe that I am under arrest?" asked K.

"Oh, yes, certainly," said the man, stepping somewhat aside, but there was no belief in his

answer, merely apprehension. "So you don't really believe me?" asked K. and, provoked

without knowing it by the man's humility, he seized him by the arm as if to compel him to

believe. He had no wish to hurt him, and besides had grasped him quite loosely, yet the

man cried out as if K. had gripped him with glowing pincers instead of with two fingers.

That ridiculous outcry was too much for K.; if the man would not believe that he was

under arrest, so much the better; perhaps he actually took him for a Judge. As a parting

gesture he gripped the man with real force, flung him back on the bench, and went on his

way. "Most of these accused men are so sensitive," said the usher. Behind them almost all

the clients were now gathered round the man, whose cries had already ceased, and they

seemed to be eagerly asking him about the incident. A guard came up to K., he was mainly

recognizable by his sword, whose sheath, at least to judge from its color, was of aluminum.

K. gaped at it and actually put out his hand to feel it. The guard, who had come to inquire

into the commotion, asked what had happened. The usher tried to put him off with a few

words, but the guard declared that he must look into this matter himself, saluted, and

strutted on with hasty but very short steps, probably resulting from gout.

K. did not trouble his head for long over him and the people in the lobby, particularly as,

when he had walked halfway down the lobby, he saw a turning leading to the right through

an opening which had no door. He inquired of the usher if this was the right way, the usher

nodded, and K. then turned into it. It troubled him that he had always to walk one or two paces ahead of the usher, in a place like this it might look as if he were a prisoner under

escort. Accordingly he paused several times to wait for the usher, but the man always

dropped behind again. At last K. said, to put an end to his discomfort: "I've seen the place

now, and I think I'll go." "You haven't seen everything yet," said the usher innocently. "I

don't want to see everything," said K., who by now felt really tired. "I want to get away,

how does one reach the outside door?" "You surely haven't lost your way already?" asked

the usher in surprise. "You just go along here to the corner and then turn to the right along

the lobby straight to the door." "You come too," said K. "Show me the way, there are so

many lobbies here, I'll never find the way." "There's only the one way," said the usher

reproachfully. "I can't go back with you, I must deliver my message and I've lost a great

deal of time through you already." "Come with me," said K. still more sharply, as if he had

at last caught the usher in a falsehood. "Don't shout like that," whispered the usher, "there

are offices everywhere hereabouts. If you don't want to go back by yourself, then come a

little farther with me, or wait here until I've delivered my message, then I'll be glad to take

you back." "No, no," said K., "I won't wait and you must come with me now." K. had not

yet even glanced round the place where he was, and only when one of the many wooden

doors opened did he turn his head. A girl whose attention must have been caught by K.'s

raised voice appeared and asked: "What does the gentleman want?" A good way behind

her he could also see a male figure approaching in the half-light. K. looked at the usher.

The man had said that nobody would pay any attention to him, and now two people were

already after him, it wouldn't take much to bring all the officials down on him, demanding

an explanation of his presence. The only comprehensible and acceptable one was that he

was an accused man and wished to know the date of his next interrogation, but that

explanation he did not wish to give, especially as it was not even in accordance with the

truth, for he had come only out of curiosity or, what was still more impossible as an

explanation of his presence, out of a desire to assure himself that the inside of this legal

system was just as loathsome as its external aspect. And it seemed, indeed, that he had

been right in that assumption, he did not want to make any further investigation, he was

dejected enough by what he had already seen, he was not at that moment in a fit state to

confront any higher official such as might appear from behind one of these doors, he

wanted to quit the place with the usher, or, if need be, alone.

But his dumb immobility must make him conspicuous, and the girl and the usher were

actually gazing at him as if they expected some great transformation to happen to him the

next moment, a transformation which they did not want to miss. And at the end of the

passage now stood the man whom K. had noticed before in the distance; he was holding on

to the lintel of the low doorway and rocking lightly on his toes, like an eager spectator. But

the girl was the first to see that K.'s behavior was really caused by a slight feeling of

faintness; she produced a chair and asked: "Won't you sit down?" K. sat down at once and

leaned his elbows on the arms of the chair so as to support himself still more securely.

"You feel a little dizzy, don't you?" she asked. Her face was close to him now, it had that

severe look which the faces of many women have in the first flower of their youth. "Don't

worry," she said. "That's nothing out of the common here, almost everybody has an attack of that kind the first time they come here. This is your first visit? Well, then, it's nothing to

be surprised at. The sun beats on the roof here and the hot roof-beams make the air stuffy

and heavy. That makes this place not particularly suitable for offices, in spite of the other

great advantages it has. But the air, well, on days when there's a great number of clients to



be attended to, and that's almost every day, it's hardly breathable. When you consider, too,

that washing of all sorts is hung up here to dry -- you can't wholly prohibit the tenants from

washing their dirty linen -- you won't find it surprising that you should feel a little faint.

But in the end one gets quite used to it. By the time you've come back once or twice you'll

hardly notice how oppressive it is here. Do you really feel better now?" K. did not answer,

he realized too painfully the shame of being delivered into the hands of these people by his

sudden weakness; besides, even now that he knew the cause of the faintness, it did not get

any better but grew somewhat worse instead. The girl noticed this at once, and to help K.

seized a bar with a hook at the end that leaned against the wall and opened with it a little

skylight just above K. to let in the fresh air. Yet so much soot fell in that she had to close

the skylight again at once and wipe K.'s hands clean with her handkerchief, since K. was

too far gone to attend to himself. He would have preferred to sit quietly there until he

recovered enough strength to walk away, yet the less he was bothered by these people the

sooner he would recover. But now the girl said: "You can't stay here, we're causing an

obstruction here" -- K. glanced round inquiringly to see what he could be obstructing -- "if

you like, I'll take you to the sick-room. Please give me a hand," she said to the man

standing in the door, who at once came over. But K. had no wish to go to the sick-room, he

particularly wanted to avoid being taken any farther, the farther he went the worse it must

be for him. "I'm quite able to go away now," he said and got up from his comfortable seat,

which had relaxed him so that he trembled as he stood. But he could not hold himself

upright. "I can't manage it after all," he said, shaking his head, and with a sigh sat down

again. He thought of the usher, who could easily get him out of the place in spite of his

weakness, but he seemed to have vanished long ago. K. peered between the girl and the

man standing before him, but could see no sign of the usher. "I fancy," said the man, who

was stylishly dressed and was wearing a conspicuously smart gray waistcoat ending in two

long sharp points, "that the gentleman's faintness is due to the atmosphere here, and the

best thing to do -- and what he would like best -- is not to take him to the sick-room at all,

but out of these offices altogether." "That's it!" cried K., so delighted that he almost broke

into the man's words, "I should feel better at once, I'm sure of it, I'm not so terribly weak

either, I only need a little support under my arms, I won't give you much trouble, it isn't

very far after all, just take me to the door, then I'll sit for a little on the stairs and recover in

no time, for I don't usually suffer from these attacks, I was surprised myself by this one. I

am an official too and accustomed to office air, but this is really more than one can bear,

you said so yourselves. Will you have the goodness, then, to let me lean upon you a little,

for I feel dizzy and my head goes round when I try to stand up by myself." And lie lifted

his shoulders to make it easier for the two of them to take him under the arms.

Yet the man did not respond to his request but kept his hands quietly in his pockets

and laughed. "You see," he said to the girl. "I hit the nail on the head. It's only here that this gentleman feels upset, not in other places." The girl smiled too, but tapped the man

lightly on the arm with her finger tips, as if he had gone too far in jesting like that with K.

"But dear me," said the man, still laughing, "I'll show the gentleman to the door, of course

I will !" "Then that's all right," said the girl, inclining her elegant head for a moment.

"Don't take his laughter too much to heart," she said to K., who had sunk again into vacant

melancholy and apparently expected no explanation. "This gentleman -- may I introduce

you?" (the gentleman waved his hand to indicate permission) "this gentleman, then,

represents our Information Bureau. He gives clients all the information they need, and as

our procedure is not very well known among the populace, a great deal of information is

asked for. He has an answer to every question, if you ever feel like it you can try him out.

But that isn't his only claim to distinction, he has another, the smartness of his clothes. We -

- that's to say the staff -- made up our minds that the Clerk of Inquiries, since he's always

dealing with clients and is the first to see them, must be smartly dressed so as to create a

good first impression. The rest of us, as you must have noticed at once from myself, are

very badly and old-fashionedly dressed, I'm sorry to say; there isn't much sense anyhow in

spending money on clothes, for we're hardly ever out of these offices, we even sleep here.

But, as I say, we considered that in his case good clothes were needed. And as the

management, which in this respect is somewhat peculiar, refused to provide these clothes,

we opened a subscription -- some of the clients contributed too -- and we bought him this

fine suit and some others as well. Nothing more would be needed now to produce a good

impression, but he spoils it all again by his laughter which puts people off." "That's how it

is," said the gentleman ironically, "yet I don't understand, Fräulein, why you should tell

this gentleman all our intimate secrets, or rather thrust them on him, for he doesn't want to

hear them at all. Just look at him, he's obviously much too busy with his own thoughts." K.

felt no inclination even to make a retort, the girl's intentions were no doubt good, probably

she merely wanted to distract him or give him chance to pull himself together, but she had

not gone the right way about it. "Well, I needed to explain your laughter to him," the girl

said. "It sounded insulting." "I fancy he would overlook much worse insults if I would

only take him out of here." K. said nothing, he did not even look up, he suffered the two of

them to discuss him as if he were an inanimate object, indeed he actually preferred that.

Then suddenly he felt the man's hand under one arm and the girl's hand under the other.

"Up you get, you feeble fellow," said the man. "Many thanks to both of you," said K.,

joyfully surprised, and he got up slowly and himself moved these strangers' hands to the

places where he felt most in need of support. "It must seem to you," said the girl softly in

K.'s ear as they neared the passage, "as if I were greatly concerned to show the Clerk of

Inquiries in a good light, but you can believe me, I only wanted to speak the truth about

him. He isn't a hard-hearted man. He isn't obliged to help sick people out of here, and yet

he does so, as you can see. Perhaps none of us is hardhearted, we should be glad to help

everybody, yet as Law Court officials we easily take on the appearance of being

hardhearted and of not wishing to help. That really worries me." "Wouldn't you like to sit

down here for a little?" asked the Clerk of Inquiries; they were out in the main lobby now

and just opposite the client to whom K. had first spoken. K. felt almost ashamed before the

man, he had stood so erect before him the first time; now it took a couple of people to hold him up, the Clerk of Inquiries was balancing his hat on the tips of his fingers, his hair was

in disorder and hung down over his sweat-drenched forehead. But the client seemed to see

nothing of all this, he stood up humbly before the Clerk of Inquiries (who stared through

him) and merely sought to excuse his presence. "I know," he said, "that the decision on my

affidavits cannot be expected today. But I came all the same, I thought that I might as well

wait here, it is Sunday, I have lots of time and here I disturb nobody." "You needn't be so

apologetic," replied the Clerk of Inquiries. "Your solicitude is entirely to be commended;

you're taking up extra room, here, I admit, but so long as you don't inconvenience me, I

shan't hinder you at all from following the progress of your case as closely as you please.

When one sees so many people who scandalously neglect their duty, one learns to have

patience with men like you. You may sit down." "How well he knows how to talk to

clients !" whispered the girl. K. nodded, but immediately gave a violent start when the

Clerk of Inquiries asked again: "Wouldn't you like to sit down here?" "No," said K. "I don't

want a rest." He said this with the utmost possible decision, though in reality he would

have been very glad to sit down. He felt as if he were seasick. He felt he was on a ship

rolling in heavy seas. It was as if the waters were dashing against the wooden walls, as if

the roaring of breaking waves came from the end of the passage, as if the passage itself

pitched and rolled and the waiting clients on either side rose and fell with it. All the more

incomprehensible, therefore, was the composure of the girl and the man who were

escorting him. He was delivered into their hands, if they let him go he must fall like a

block of wood. They kept glancing around with their sharp little eyes, K. was aware of

their regular advance without himself taking part in it, for he was now being almost carried

from step to step. At last he noticed that they were talking to him, but he could not make

out what they were saying, he heard nothing but the din that filled the whole place, through

which a shrill unchanging note like that of a siren seemed to ring. "Louder," he whispered



with bowed head, and he was ashamed, for he knew that they were speaking loudly

enough, though he could not make out what they said. Then, as if the wall in front of him

had been split in two, a current of fresh air was at last wafted toward him, and he heard a

voice near him saying: "First he wants to go, then you tell him a hundred times that the

door is in front of him and he makes no move to go." K. saw that he was standing before

the outside door, which the girl had opened. It was as if all his energies returned at one

bound, to get a foretaste of freedom he set his feet at once on a step of the staircase and

from there said good-by to his conductors, who bent their heads down to hear him. "Many

thanks," he said several times, then shook hands with them again and again and only left

off when he thought he saw that they, accustomed as they were to the office air, felt ill in

the relatively fresh air that came up the stairway. They could scarcely answer him and the

girl might have fallen if K. had not shut the door with the utmost haste. K. stood still for a

moment, put his hair to rights with the help of his pocket mirror, lifted up his hat, which

lay on the step below him -- the Clerk of Inquiries must have thrown it there -- and then

leapt down the stairs so buoyantly and with such long strides that he became almost afraid

of his own reaction. His usually sound constitution had never provided him with such

surprises before. Could his body possibly be meditating a revolution and preparing a new

trial for him, since he was withstanding the old one with such ease? He did not entirely reject the idea of going to consult a doctor at the first opportunity, in any case he had made

up his mind -- and there he could advise himself -- to spend all his Sunday mornings in

future to better purpose. Chapter 4

Fräulein Bürstner's Friend

IN THE next few days K. found it impossible to exchange even a word with Fräulein

Bürstner. He tried to get hold of her by every means he could think of, but she always

managed to elude him. He went straight home from his office and sat on the sofa in his

room, with the light out and the door open, concentrating his attention on the entrance hail.

If the maid on her way past shut the door of his apparently empty room, he would get up

after a while and open it again. He rose every morning an hour earlier than usual on the

chance of catching Fräulein Bürstner alone, before she went to her work. But none of these

stratagems succeeded. Then he wrote a letter to her, sending it both to her office and to her

house address, in which he once more tried to justify his behavior, offered to make any

reparation required, promised never to overstep the bounds that she should prescribe for

him, and begged her to give him an opportunity of merely speaking to her, more especially

as he could arrange nothing with Frau Grubach until he had first consulted with her,

concluding with the information that next Sunday he would wait in his room all day for

some sign that she was prepared either to grant his request or at least to explain why, even

although he was pledging his word to defer to her in everything, she would not grant it. His

letters were not returned, but neither were they answered. On Sunday, however, he was

given a sign whose meaning was sufficiently clear. In the early morning K. observed

through the keyhole of his door an unusual commotion in the entrance hail, which soon

explained itself. A teacher of French, she was a German girl called Montag, a sickly, pale

girl with a slight limp who till now had occupied a room of her own, was apparently

moving into Fräulein Bürstner room. For hours she kept on trailing through the entrance

hall. She seemed to be always forgetting some article of underwear or a scrap of drapery or

a book that necessitated a special journey to carry it into the new apartment.

When Frau Grubach brought in his breakfast -- ever since she had angered K. she had

devoted herself to performing even the most trifling services for him -- K. could not help

breaking the silence between them for the first time. "Why is there such a row in the

entrance hall today?" he asked as he poured out his coffee. "Couldn't it be put off to some

other time? Must the place be spring-cleaned on a Sunday?" Although K. did not glance up

at Frau Grubach, he could observe that she heaved a sigh of relief. These questions, though

stern, she construed as forgiveness or as an approach toward forgiveness. "The place is not

being spring-cleaned, Herr K.," she said. "Fräulein Montag is moving in with Fräulein

Bürstner and shifting her things across." She said no more, waiting first to see how K.

would take it and if he would allow her to go on. But K. kept her on the rack, reflectively

stirring his coffee and remaining silent. Then he looked up at her and said: "Have you

given up your previous suspicions of Fräulein Bürstner?" "Herr K.," cried Frau Grubach, who had been merely waiting for this question and now stretched out her clasped hands

toward him, "you took a casual remark of mine far too seriously. It never entered my head

to offend you or anyone else. You have surely known me long enough, Herr K., to be

certain of that. You have no idea how I have suffered during these last few days! I to speak

ill of my boarders! And you, Herr K., believed it! And said I should give you notice! Give

you notice!" The last ejaculation was already stifled in her sobs, she raised her apron to her

face and wept aloud.

"Please don't cry, Frau Grubach," said K., looking out through the window, he was

really thinking of Fräulein Bürstner and of the fact that she had taken a strange girl into her

room. "Please don't cry," he said again as he turned back to the room and found Frau

Grubach still weeping. "I didn't mean what I said so terribly seriously either. We

misunderstood each other. That can happen occasionally even between old friends." Frau

Grubach took her apron from her eyes to see whether K. were really appeased. "Come

now, that's all there was to it," said K., and then ventured to add, since to judge from Frau

Grubach's expression her nephew the Captain could not have divulged anything: "Do you

really believe that I would turn against you because of a strange girl?" "That's just it, Herr

K.," said Frau Grubach, it was her misfortune that as soon as she felt relieved in her mind

she immediately said something tactless, "I kept asking myself: Why should Herr K.

bother himself so much about Fräulein Bürstner? Why should he quarrel with me because

of her, though he knows that every cross word from him makes me lose my sleep? And I

said nothing about the girl that I hadn't seen with my own eyes." K. made no reply to this,

he should have sent her from the room at the very first word, and he did not want to do

that. He contented himself with drinking his coffee and leaving Frau Grubach to feel that

her presence was burdensome. Outside he could hear again the trailing step of Fräulein

Montag as she limped from end to end of the entrance hall. "Do you hear that?" asked K.,

indicating the door. "Yes," said Frau Grubach, sighing, "I offered to help her and to order

the maid to help too, but she's self-willed, she insists on moving everything herself. I'm

surprised at Fräulein Bürstner. I often regret having Fräulein Montag as a boarder, but now

Fräulein Bürstner is actually taking her into her own room." "You mustn't worry about

that," said K., crushing with the spoon the sugar left at the bottom of his cup. "Does it

mean any loss to you?" "No," said Frau Grubach, "in itself it's quite welcome to me, I am

left with an extra room, and I can put my nephew, the Captain, there. I've been bothered in

case he might have disturbed you these last few days, for I had to let him occupy the living

room next door. He's not very considerate." "What an idea !" said K., getting up. "There's

no question of that. You really seem to think I'm hypersensitive because I can't stand

Fräulein Montag's trailings to and fro -- there she goes again, coming back this time." Frau

Grubach felt quite helpless. "Shall I tell her, Herr K., to put off moving the rest of her

things until later? If you like I'll do so at once." "But she's got to move into Fräulein

Bürstner room !" cried K. "Yes," said Frau Grubach, she could not quite make out what K.

meant. "Well then," said K., "she must surely be allowed to shift her things there." Frau

Grubach simply nodded. Her dumb helplessness, which outwardly had the look of simple

obstinacy, exasperated K. still more. He began to walk up and down from the window to the door and back again, and by doing that he hindered Frau Grubach from being able to

slip out of the room, which she would probably have done.

K. had just reached the door again when there was a knock. It was the maid, who

announced that Fräulein Montag would like a word or two with Herr K. and that she

accordingly begged him to come to the dining room, where she was waiting for him. K.

listened pensively to the message, then he turned an almost mocking eye on the startled

Frau Grubach. His look seemed to say that he had long foreseen this invitation of Fräulein

Montag's, and that it accorded very well with all the persecution he had had to endure that



Sunday morning from Frau Grubach's boarders. He sent the maid back with the

information that he would come at once, then went to his wardrobe to change his coat, and

in answer to Frau Grubach, who was softly lamenting over the behavior of the importunate

Fräulein Montag, had nothing to say but to request her to remove his breakfast tray. "Why,

you've scarcely touched anything," said Frau Grubach. "Oh, do take it away," cried K., it

seemed to him as if Fräulein Montag were somehow mixed up with the food and made it

nauseating.

As he crossed the entrance hall he glanced at the closed door of Fräulein Bürstner

room. Still, he had not been invited there, but to the dining room, where he flung open the

door without knocking.

It was a very long narrow room with one large window. There was only enough space

in it to wedge two cupboards at an angle on either side of the door, the rest of the room

was completely taken up by the long dining-table, which began near the door and reached

to the very window, making it almost inaccessible. The table was already laid, and for

many people too, since on Sunday almost all the boarders had their midday dinner in the

house.

When K. entered, Fräulein Montag advanced from the window along one side of the

table to meet him. They greeted each other in silence. Then Fräulein Montag said, holding

her head very erect as usual: "I don't know if you know who I am." K. stared at her with

contracted brows. "Of course I do," he said, "you've been staying quite a long time with

Frau Grubach, haven't you?" "But you don't take much interest in the boarders, I fancy,"

said Fräulein Montag. "No," said K. "Won't you take a seat?" asked Fräulein Montag. In

silence they pulled out two chairs at the very end of the table and sat down opposite each

other. But Fräulein Montag immediately stood up again, for she had left her little handbag

lying on the window sill and now went to fetch it; she trailed for it along the whole length

of the room. As she came back, swinging the bag lightly in her hand, she said: "I've been

asked by my friend to say something to you, that's all. She wanted to come herself, but she

is feeling a little unwell today. She asks you to excuse her and listen to me instead. She

would not have said anything more to you, in any case, than I am going to say. On the

contrary, I fancy that I can actually tell you more, as I am relatively impartial. Don't you

think so too ?" "Well, what is there to say ?" replied K., who was weary of seeing Fräulein Montag

staring so fixedly at his lips. Her stare was already trying to dominate any words he might

utter. "Fräulein Bürstner evidently refuses to grant me the personal interview I asked for."

"That is so," said Fräulein Montag, "or rather that isn't it at all, you put it much too harshly.

Surely, in general, interviews are neither deliberately accepted nor refused. But it may

happen that one sees no point in an interview, and that is the case here. After that last

remark of yours I can speak frankly, I take it. You have begged my friend to communicate

with you by letter or by word of mouth. Now, my friend, at least that is what I must

assume, knows what this conversation would be about, and is therefore convinced, for

reasons of which I am ignorant, that it would be to nobody's benefit if it actually took

place. To tell the truth, she did not mention the matter to me until yesterday and only in

passing, she said among other things that you could not attach very much importance to

this interview either, for it could only have been by accident that you hit on the idea, and

that even without a specific explanation you would soon come to see how silly the whole

affair was, if indeed you didn't see that already. I told her that that might be quite true, but

that I considered it advisable, if the matter were to be completely cleared up, that you

should receive an explicit answer. I offered myself as an intermediary, and after some

hesitation my friend yielded to my persuasions. But I hope that I have served your

interests, too, for the slightest uncertainty even in the most trifling matter is always a

worry, and when, as in this case, it can be easily dispelled, it is better that that should be

done at once." "Thank you," said K. and he slowly rose to his feet, glanced at Fräulein

Montag, then at the table, then out through the window -- the sun was shining on the house

opposite -- and walked to the door. Fräulein Montag followed him for a few steps, as if she

did not quite trust him. But at the door they had both to draw back, for it opened and

Captain Lanz entered. This was the first time that K. had seen him close at hand. He was a

tall man in the early forties with a tanned, fleshy face. He made a slight bow which

included K. as well as Fräulein Montag, then went up to her and respectfully kissed her

hand. His movements were easy. His politeness toward Fräulein Montag was in striking

contrast to the treatment which she had received from K. All the same, Fräulein Montag

did not seem to be offended with K., for she actually purposed, K. fancied, to introduce

him to the Captain. But K. did not wish to be introduced, he was not in the mind to be

polite either to the Captain or to Fräulein Montag, the hand-kissing had in his eyes turned

the pair of them into accomplices who, under a cloak of the utmost amiability and altruism,

were seeking to bar his way to Fräulein Bürstner. Yet he fancied that he could see even

more than that, he recognized that Fräulein Montag had chosen a very good if somewhat

two-edged weapon. She had exaggerated the importance of the connection between

Fräulein Bürstner and K., she had exaggerated above all the importance of the interview he

had asked for, and she had tried at the same time so to manipulate things as to make it

appear that it was K. who was exaggerating. She would find that she was deceived, K.

wished to exaggerate nothing, he knew that Fräulein Bürstner was an ordinary little typist

who could not resist him for long. In coming to this conclusion he deliberately left out of

account what Frau Grubach had told him about Fräulein Bürstner. He was thinking all this as he quitted the room with a curt word of leave-taking. He made straight for his own

room, but a slight titter from Fräulein Montag, coming from the dining room behind him,

put it into his head that perhaps he could provide a surprise for the pair of them, the

Captain as well as Fräulein Montag. He glanced round and listened to make sure that no

interruption was likely from any of the adjacent rooms, all was still, nothing was to be

heard but a murmur of voices in the dining room and the voice of Frau Grubach coming

from the passage leading to the kitchen. The opportunity seemed excellent, and K. went

over to Fräulein Bürstner door and knocked softly. When nothing happened he knocked

again, but again no answer came. Was she sleeping? Or was she really unwell? Or was she

pretending she wasn't there, knowing that it could only be K. who was knocking so softly?

K. assumed that she was pretending and knocked more loudly, and at last, as his knocking

had no result, cautiously opened the door, not without a feeling that he was doing

something wrong and even more useless than wrong. There was nobody in the room.

Moreover it had scarcely any resemblance now to the room which K. had seen. Against the

wall two beds stood next to each other, three chairs near the door were heaped with dresses

and underclothes, a wardrobe was standing open. Fräulein Bürstner had apparently gone

out while Fräulein Montag was saying her piece in the dining room. K. was not very much

taken aback, he had hardly expected at this stage to get hold of Fräulein Bürstner so easily,

he had made this attempt, indeed, mainly to annoy Fräulein Montag. Yet the shock was all

the greater when, as he was shutting the door again, he saw Fräulein Montag and the

Captain standing talking together in the open door of the dining room. They had perhaps

been standing there all the time, they scrupulously avoided all appearance of having been

observing him, they talked in low voices, following K.'s movements only with the

abstracted gaze one has for people passing when one is deep in conversation. All the same,

their glances weighed heavily upon K., and he made what haste he could to his room,

keeping close against the wall. Chapter 5

The Whipper

A FEW evenings later K. was passing along the Bank corridor from his office to the main

staircase -- he was almost the last to leave, only two clerks in the dispatch department were

still at work by the dim light of a glow lamp -- when he heard convulsive sighs behind a

door, which he had always taken to be the door of a lumber-room, although he had never

opened it. He stopped in astonishment and listened to make sure that he had not been

mistaken -- all was still, yet in a little while the sighing began again. At first he thought of

fetching one of the dispatch clerks, he might need a witness, but then he was seized by

such uncontrollable curiosity that he literally tore the door open. It was, as he had correctly



assumed, a lumber-room. Bundles of useless old papers and empty earthenware ink bottles

lay in a tumbled heap behind the threshold. But in the room itself stood three men,

stooping because of the low ceiling, by the light of a candle stuck on a shelf. "What are

you doing here?" asked K., in great haste and agitation, but not loud. One of the men, who

was clearly in authority over the other two and took the eye first, was sheathed in a sort of

dark leather garment which left his throat and a good deal of his chest and the whole of his

arms bare. He made no answer. But the other two cried: "Sir! We're to be flogged because

you complained about us to the Examining Magistrate." And only then did K. realize that it

was actually the warders Franz and Willem, and that the third man was holding a rod in his

hand with which to beat them. "Why," said K., staring at them in astonishment, "I never

complained, I only said what happened in my rooms. And, after all, your behavior there

was not exactly blameless." "Sir," said Willem, while Franz openly tried to take cover

behind him from the third man, "if you only knew how badly we are paid, you wouldn't be

so hard on us. I have a family to feed and Franz here wants to get married, a man tries to

make whatever he can, and you don't get rich on hard work, not even if you work day and

night. Your fine shirts were a temptation, of course that kind of thing is forbidden to

warders, it was wrong, but it's a tradition that body-linen is the warders' perquisite, it has

always been the case, believe me; and it's understandable too, for what importance can

such things have for a man who is unlucky enough to be arrested? But if he ventilates it

openly, punishment is bound to follow." "I had no idea of all this, nor did I ever demand

that you should be punished, I was only defending a principle." "Franz," Willem turned to

the other warder, "didn't I tell you that the gentleman never asked us to be punished? Now

you see that lie didn't even know we should be punished." "Don't be taken in by what they

say," remarked the third man to K., "the punishment is as Just as it is inevitable." "Don't

listen to him," said Willem, interrupting himself to clap his hand, over which he had got a

stinging blow with the rod, to his mouth. "We are only being punished because you

accused us; if you hadn't, nothing would have happened, not even if they had discovered

what we did. Do you call that justice? Both of us, and especially myself, have a long

record of trustworthy service as warders -- you must yourself admit that, officially speaking, we guarded you quite well -- we had every prospect of advancement and would

certainly have been promoted to be Whippers pretty soon, like this man here, who simply

had the luck never to be complained of, for a complaint of that kind really happens very

seldom indeed. And all is lost now, sir, our careers are done for, we'll be set to do much

more menial work than a warder's, and, besides that, we're in for a whipping, and that's

horribly painful." "Can that birch-rod cause such terrible pain?" asked K., examining the

switch, which the man waved to and fro in front of him. "We'll have to take off all our

clothes first," said Willem. "Ah, I see," said K., and he looked more attentively at the

Whipper, who was tanned like a sailor and had a brutal, healthy face. "Is there no way of

getting these two off their whipping?" K. asked him. "No," said the man, smilingly shaking

his head. "Strip," he ordered the warders. And he said to K.: "You mustn't believe all they

say, they're so terrified of the whipping that they've already lost what wits they had. For

instance, all that this one here" -- he pointed to Willem -- "says about his possible career is

simply absurd. See how fat he is -- the first cuts of the birch will be quite lost in fat. Do

you know what made him so fat? He stuffs himself with the breakfasts of all the people he

arrests. Didn't he eat up your breakfast too? There, you see, I told you so. But a man with a

belly like that couldn't ever become a Whipper, it's quite out of the question." "There are

Whippers just like me," maintained Willem, loosening his trouser belt. "No," said the

Whipper, drawing the switch across his neck so that he winced, "you aren't supposed to be

listening, you're to take off your clothes." "I'll reward you well if you'll let them go," said

K., and without glancing at the Whipper again -- such things should be done with averted

eyes on both sides -- he drew out his pocketbook. "So you want to lay a complaint against

me too," said the Whipper, "and get me a whipping as well? No, no!" "Do be reasonable,"

said K. "If I had wanted these two men to be punished, I shouldn't be trying to buy them

off now. I could simply leave, shut this door after me, close my eyes and ears, and go

home; but I don't want to do that, I really want to see them set free; if I had known that

they would be punished or even that they could be punished, I should never have

mentioned their names. For in my view they are not guilty. The guilt lies with the

organization. It is the high officials who are guilty." "That's so," cried the warders and at

once got a cut of the switch over their backs, which were bare now. "If it was one of the

high Judges you were flogging," said K., and as he spoke he thrust down the rod which the

Whipper was raising again, "I certainly wouldn't try to keep you from laying on with a

will, on the contrary I would pay you extra to encourage you in the good work." "What you

say sounds reasonable enough," said the man, "but I refuse to be bribed. I am here to whip

people, and whip them I shall." The warder Franz, who, perhaps hoping that K.'s

intervention might succeed, had thus far kept as much as possible in the background, now

came forward to the door clad only in his trousers, fell on his knees, and clinging to K.'s

arm whispered: "If you can't get him to spare both of us, try to get me off at least. Willem

is older than I am, and far less sensitive too, besides he's had a small whipping already,

some years ago, but I've never been in disgrace yet, and I was only following Willem's

lead in what I did, he's my teacher, for better or worse. My poor sweetheart is awaiting the

outcome at the door of the Bank. I'm so ashamed and miserable." He dried his tear-wet

face on K.'s jacket. "I can't wait any longer," said the Whipper, grasping the rod with both hands and making a cut at Franz, while Willem cowered in a corner and secretly watched

without daring to turn his head. Then the shriek rose from Franz's throat, single and

irrevocable, it did not seem to come from a human being but from some martyred

instrument, the whole corridor rang with it, the whole building must hear it. "Don't," cried

K.; he was beside himself, he stood staring in the direction from which the clerks must

presently come running, but he gave Franz a push, not a violent one but violent enough

nevertheless to make the half-senseless man fall and convulsively claw at the floor with his

hands; but even then Franz did not escape his punishment, the birch-rod found him where

he was lying, its point swished up and down regularly as he writhed on the floor. And now

a clerk was already visible in the distance and a few paces behind him another. K. quickly

slammed the door, stepped over to a window close by, which looked out on the courtyard,

and opened it. The shrieks had completely stopped. To keep the clerks from approaching

any nearer, K. cried: "It's me." "Good evening, Sir," they called back. "Has anything

happened?" "No, no," replied K. "It was only a dog howling in the courtyard." As the

clerks still did not budge, he added: "You can go back to your work." And to keep himself

from being involved in any conversation he leaned out of the window. When after a while

he glanced into the corridor again, they were gone. But he stayed beside the window, he

did not dare to go back into the lumber-room, and he had no wish to go home either. It was

a little square courtyard into which he was looking down, surrounded by offices, all the

windows were dark now, but the topmost panes cast back a faint reflection of the moon. K.

intently strove to pierce the darkness of one corner of the courtyard, where several handbarrows

were jumbled close together. He was deeply disappointed that he had not been

able to prevent the whipping, but it was not his fault that he had not succeeded; if Franz

had not shrieked -- it must have been very painful certainly, but in a crisis one must control

oneself -- if he had not shrieked, then K., in all probability at least, would have found some

other means of persuading the Whipper. If the whole lower grade of this organization were

scoundrels, why should the Whipper, who had the most inhuman office of all, turn out to

be an exception? Besides, K. had clearly seen his eyes glittering at the sight of the

banknote, obviously he had set about his job in earnest simply to raise his price a little

higher. And K. would not have been stingy, he was really very anxious to get the warders

off; since he had set himself to fight the whole corrupt administration of this Court, it was

obviously his duty to intervene on this occasion. But at the moment when Franz began to

shriek, any intervention became impossible. K. could not afford to let the dispatch clerks

and possibly all sorts of other people arrive and surprise him in a scene with these



creatures in the lumber-room. No one could really demand such a sacrifice from him. If a

sacrifice had been needed, it would almost have been simpler to take off his own clothes

and offer himself to the Whipper as a substitute for the warders. \* In any case the

Whipper certainly would not have accepted such a substitution, since without gaining any

advantage he would have been involved in a grave dereliction of duty, for as long as this

trial continued, K. must surely be immune from molestation by the servants of the Court.

Though of course ordinary standards might not apply here either. At all events, he could

have done nothing but slam the door, though even that action had not shut out all danger. It

was a pity that he had given Franz a push at the last moment, the state of agitation he was in was his only excuse.

He heard the steps of the clerks in the distance; so as not to attract their attention he

shut the window and began to walk away in the direction of the main staircase. At the door

of the lumber-room he stopped for a little and listened. All was as silent as the grave. The

man might have beaten the warders till they had given up the ghost, they were entirely

delivered into his power. K.'s hand was already stretched out to grasp the door-handle

when he withdrew it again. They were past help by this time, and the clerks might appear

at any moment; but he made a vow not to hush up the incident and to deal trenchantly, so

far as lay in his power, with the real culprits, the high officials, none of whom had yet

dared show his face. As he descended the outside steps of the Bank he carefully observed

all the passers-by, but even in the surrounding streets he could perceive no sign of a girl

waiting for anybody. So Franz's tale of a sweetheart waiting for him was simply a lie,

venial enough, designed merely to procure more sympathy for him.

All the next day K. could not get the warders out of his head; he was absent-minded and to

catch up on his work had to stay in his office even later than the day before. As lie passed

the lumber-room again on his way out he could not resist opening the door. And what

confronted him, instead of the darkness he had expected, bewildered him completely.

Everything was still the same, exactly as he had found it on opening the door the previous

evening. The files of old papers and the ink bottles were still tumbled behind the threshold,

the Whipper with his rod and the warders with all their clothes on were still standing there,

the candle was burning on the shelf, and the warders immediately began to wail and cry

out: "Sir!" At once K. slammed the door shut and then beat on it with his fists, as if that

would shut it more securely. He ran almost weeping to the clerks, who were quietly

working at the copying-presses and looked up at him in surprise. "Clear that lumber-room

out, can't you?" he shouted. "We're being smothered in dirt !" The clerks promised to do so

next day. K. nodded, he could hardly insist on their doing it now, so late in the evening, as

he had originally intended. He sat down for a few moments, for the sake of their company,

shuffled through some duplicates, hoping to give the impression that he was inspecting

them, and then, seeing that the men would scarcely venture to leave the building along

with him, went home, tired, his mind quite blank. Chapter 6

K's Uncle / Leni

ONE afternoon -- it was just before the day's letters went out and K. was very busy -- two

clerks bringing him some papers to sign were thrust aside and his Uncle Karl, a small

landowner from the country, came striding into the room. K. was the less alarmed by the

arrival of his uncle since for a long time he had been shrinking from it in anticipation. His

uncle was bound to turn up, he had been convinced of that for about a month past. He had

often pictured him just as he appeared now, his back slightly bent, his panama hat crushed

in his left hand, stretching out his right hand from the very doorway, and then thrusting it

recklessly across the desk, knocking over everything that came in its way. His uncle was

always in a hurry, for he was harassed by the disastrous idea that whenever he came to

town for the day he must get through all the program he had drawn up for himself, and

must not miss either a single chance of a conversation or a piece of business or an

entertainment. In all this K., who as his former ward was peculiarly obliged to him, had to

help him as best he could and also sometimes put him up for the night. "A ghost from the

past," he was in the habit of calling him.

Immediately after his first greetings -- he had no time to sit down in the chair which

K. offered him -- he begged K. to have a short talk with him in strict privacy. "It is

necessary," he said, painfully gulping, "it is necessary for my peace of mind." K. at once

sent his clerks out of the room with instructions to admit no one. "What is this I hear,

Joseph?" cried his uncle when they were alone, sitting down on the desk and making

himself comfortable by stuffing several papers under him without looking at them. K. said

nothing, he knew what was coming, but being suddenly released from the strain of

exacting work, he resigned himself for the moment to a pleasant sense of indolence and

gazed out through the window at the opposite side of the street, of which only a small

triangular section could be seen from where he was sitting, a slice of empty house-wall

between two shop windows. "You sit there staring out of the window!" cried his uncle,

flinging up his arms. "For God's sake, Joseph, answer me. Is it true? Can it be true?" "Dear

Uncle," said K., tearing himself out of his reverie. "I don't know in the least what you

mean." "Joseph," said his uncle warningly, "you've always told the truth, as far as I know.

Am I to take these words of yours as a bad sign?" "I can guess, certainly, what you're

after," said K. accommodatingly. "You've probably heard something about my trial." "That

is so," replied his uncle, nodding gravely. "I have heard about your trial." "But from whom

?" asked K. "Erna wrote to me about it," said his uncle. "She doesn't see much of you, I

know, you don't pay much attention to her, I regret to say, and yet she heard about it. I got

the letter this morning and of course took the first train here. I had no other reason for

coming, but it seems to be a sufficient one. I can read you the bit from her letter that

mentions you." He took the letter from his pocketbook. "Here it is. She writes: `I haven't seen Joseph for a long time, last week I called at the Bank, but Joseph was so busy that I

couldn't see him; I waited for almost an hour, but I had to leave then, for I had a piano

lesson. I should have liked very much to speak to him, perhaps I shall soon have the

chance. He sent me a great big box of chocolates for my birthday, it was very sweet and

thoughtful of him. I forgot to write and mention it at the time, and it was only your asking

that reminded me. For I may tell you that chocolate vanishes on the spot in this boarding school,

hardly do you realize that you've been presented with a box when it's gone. But

about Joseph, there is something else that I feel I should tell you. As I said, I was not able

to see him at the Bank because he was engaged with a gentleman. After I had waited

meekly for a while I asked an attendant if the interview was likely to last much longer. He

said that that might very well be, for it had probably something to do with the case which

was being brought against the Chief Clerk. I asked what case, and was he not mistaken, but

he said he was not mistaken, there was a case and a very serious one too, but more than

that he did not know. He himself would like to help Herr K., for he was a good and just

man, but he did not know how he was to do it, and he only wished that some influential

gentleman would take the Chief Clerk's part. To be sure, that was certain to happen and

everything would be all right in the end, but for the time being, as he could see from Herr

K.'s state of mind, things looked far from well. Naturally I did not take all this too

seriously, I tried to reassure the simple fellow and forbade him to talk about it to anyone

else, and I'm sure it's just idle gossip. All the same, it might be as well if you, dearest

Father, were to inquire into it on your next visit to town, it will be easy for you to find out

the real state of things, and if necessary to get some of your influential friends to intervene.

Even if it shouldn't be necessary, and that is most likely, at least it will give your daughter

an early chance of welcoming you with a kiss, which would please her.' A good child,"

said K.'s uncle when he had finished reading, wiping a tear from his eye. K. nodded, he

had completely forgotten Erna among the various troubles he had had lately, and the story

about the chocolates she had obviously invented simply to save his face before his uncle

and aunt. It was really touching, and the theater tickets which he now resolved to send her

regularly would be a very inadequate return, but he did not feel equal at present to calling

at her boarding-school and chattering to an eighteen-year-old flapper. "And what have you

got to say now?" asked his uncle, who had temporarily forgotten all his haste and



agitation over the letter, which he seemed to be rereading. "Yes, Uncle," said K., "it's quite

true." "True?" cried his uncle. "What is true? How on earth can it be true? What case is

this? Not a criminal case, surely?" "A criminal case," answered K. "And you sit there

coolly with a criminal case hanging round your neck?" cried his uncle, his voice growing

louder and louder. "The cooler I am, the better in the end," said K. wearily. "Don't worry."

"That's a fine thing to ask of me," cried his uncle. "Joseph, my dear Joseph, think of

yourself, think of your relatives, think of our good name. You have been a credit to us until

now, you can't become a family disgrace. Your attitude," he looked at K. with his head

slightly cocked, "doesn't please me at all, that isn't how an innocent man behaves if he's

still in his senses. Just tell me quickly what it is all about, so that I can help you. It's

something to do with the Bank, of course?" "No," said K., getting up. "But you're talking

too loudly, Uncle, I feel pretty certain the attendant is listening at the door, and I dislike the idea. We had better go out somewhere. I'll answer all your questions then as far as I can. I

know quite well that I owe the family an explanation." "Right," cried his uncle, "quite

right, but hurry, Joseph, hurry!" "I have only to leave some instructions," said K., and he

summoned his chief assistant by telephone, who appeared in a few minutes. In his agitation

K.'s uncle indicated to the clerk by a sweep of the hand that K. had sent for him, which, of

course, was obvious enough. K., standing beside his desk, took up various papers and in a

low voice explained to the young man, who listened coolly but attentively, what must be

done in his absence. His uncle disturbed him by standing beside him round-eyed and biting

his lips nervously; he was not actually listening, but the appearance of listening was

disturbing enough in itself. He next began to pace up and down the room, pausing every

now and then by the window or before a picture, with sudden ejaculations, such as: "It's

completely incomprehensible to me" or "Goodness knows what's to come of this." The

young man behaved as if he noticed nothing, quietly heard K.'s instructions to the end,

took a few notes, and went, after having bowed both to K. and to his uncle, who, however,

had his back to him just then and was gazing out of the window, flinging out his arms, and

clutching at the curtains. The door had scarcely closed when K.'s uncle cried: "At last that

jackass has gone; now we can go too. At last !" Unluckily K. could find no means to make

his uncle stop inquiring about the case in the main vestibule, where several clerks and

attendants were standing about, while the Assistant Manager himself was crossing the

floor. "Come now, Joseph," began his uncle, returning a brief nod to the bows of the

waiting clerks, "tell me frankly now what kind of a case this is." K. made a few

noncommittal remarks, laughing a little, and only on the staircase explained to his uncle

that he had not wanted to speak openly before the clerks. "Right," said his uncle, "but get it

off your chest now." He listened with bent head, puffing hastily at a cigar. "The first thing

to grasp, Uncle," said K., "is that this is not a case before an ordinary court." "That's bad,"

said his uncle. "What do you mean ?" asked K., looking at his uncle. "I mean that it's. bad,"

repeated his uncle. They were standing on the out- side steps of the Bank; as the

doorkeeper seemed to be listening, K. dragged his uncle away; they were swallowed up in

the street traffic. The uncle, who had taken K.'s arm, now no longer inquired so urgently

about the case, and for a while they actually walked on in silence. "But how did this

happen?" his uncle asked at last, stopping so suddenly that the people walking behind him

shied off in alarm. "Things like this don't occur suddenly, they pile up gradually, there

must have been indications. Why did you never write to me? You know I would do

anything for you, I'm still your guardian in a sense and till now I have been proud of it. Of

course I'll do what I can to help you, only it's very difficult when the case is already under

way. The best thing, at any rate, would be for you to take a short holiday and come to stay

with us in the country. You've got a bit thinner, I notice that now. You'd get back your

strength in the country, that would be all to the good, for this trial will certainly be a severe

strain on you. But besides that, in a sense you'd be getting away from the clutches of the

Court. Here they have all sorts of machinery which they will automatically set in motion

against you, depend on that; but if you were in the country they would have to appoint

agents or get at you by letter or telegram or telephone. That would naturally weaken the

effect, not that you would escape them altogether, but you'd have a breathing-space." "Still, they might forbid me to go away," said K., who was beginning to follow his uncle's

line of thought. "I don't think they would do that," said his uncle reflectively, "after all,

they wouldn't lose so much by your going away." "I thought," said K., taking his uncle's

arm to keep him from standing still, "that you would attach even less importance to this

business than I do, and now you are taking it so seriously." "Joseph !" cried his uncle,

trying to get his arm free so as to be able to stand still, only K. would not let him, "you're

quite changed, you always used to have such a clear brain, and is it going to fail you now?

Do you want to lose this case? And do you know what that would mean? It would mean

that you would be absolutely ruined. And that all your relatives would be ruined too or at

least dragged in the dust. Joseph, pull yourself together. Your indifference drives me mad.

Looking at you, one would almost believe the old saying: `Cases of that kind are always

lost.' " "Dear Uncle," said K., "it's no use getting excited, it's as useless on your part as it

would be on mine. No case is won by getting excited, you might let my practical

experience count for something, look how I respect yours, as I have always done, even

when you astonish me. Since you tell me that the family would be involved in any scandal

arising from the case -- I don't see myself how that could be so, but that's beside the point --

I'll submit willingly to your judgment. Only I think going to the country would be

inadvisable even from your point of view, for it would look like flight and therefore guilt.

Besides, though I'm more hard-pressed here, I can push the case on my own more

energetically." "Quite right," said his uncle in a tone of relief, as if he saw their minds

converging at last, "I only made the suggestion because I thought your indifference would

endanger the case while you stayed here, and that it might be better if I took it up for you

instead. But if you intend to push it energetically yourself, that of course would be far

better." "We're agreed on that, then," said K. "And now can you suggest what my first step

should be?" "I'll have to do a bit of thinking about it, naturally," said his uncle, "you must

consider that I have lived in the country for twenty years almost without a break, and my

flair for such matters can't be so good as it was. Various connections of mine with

influential persons who would probably know better than I how to tackle this affair have

slackened in the course of time. I'm a bit isolated in the country, as you know yourself.

Actually it's only in emergencies like this that one becomes aware of it. Besides, this affair

of yours has come on me more or less unexpectedly, though strangely enough, after Erna's

letter, I guessed at something of the kind, and as soon as I saw you today I was almost sure

of it. Still that doesn't matter, the important thing now is to lose no time." Before he had

finished speaking he was already on tiptoe waiting for a taxi, and now, shouting an address

to the driver, he dragged K. into the car after him. "We'll drive straight to Huld, the

lawyer," he said. "He was at school with me. You know his name, of course? You don't?

That is really extraordinary. He has quite a considerable reputation as a defending counsel

and a poor man's lawyer. But it's as a human being that I'm prepared to pin my faith to

him." "I'm willing to try anything you suggest," said K., though the hasty headlong way in

which his uncle was dealing with the matter caused him some perturbation. It was not very

flattering to be driven to a poor man's lawyer as a petitioner. "I did not know," he said,

"that in a case like this one could employ a lawyer." "But of course," said his uncle. "That's

obvious. Why not? And now tell me everything that has happened up to now, so that I have some idea where we stand." K. at once began his story and left out no single detail,

for absolute frankness was the only protest he could make against his uncle's assumption

that the case was a terrible disgrace. Fräulein Bürstner's name he mentioned only once and

in passing, but that did not detract from his frankness, since Fräulein Bürstner had no

connection with the case. As he told his story he gazed out through the window and noted

that they were approaching the very suburb where the Law Court had its attic offices; he

drew his uncle's attention to this fact, but his uncle did not seem to be particularly struck

by the coincidence. The taxi stopped before a dark house. His uncle rang the bell of the

first door on the ground floor; while they were waiting he bared his great teeth in a smile



and whispered: "Eight o'clock, an unusual time for clients to call. But Huld won't take it

amiss from me." Behind a grille in the door two great dark eyes appeared, gazed at the two

visitors for a moment, and then vanished again; yet the door did not open. K. and his uncle

assured each other that they had really seen a pair of eyes. "A new maid, probably afraid of

strangers," said K.'s uncle and knocked again. Once more the eyes appeared and now they

seemed almost sad, yet that might have been an illusion created by the naked gas-jet which

burned just over their heads and kept hissing shrilly but gave little light. "Open the door !"

shouted K.'s uncle, banging upon it with his fists, "we're friends of Herr Huld." "Herr Huld

is ill," came a whisper from behind them. A door had opened at the other end of the little

passage and a man in a dressing-gown was standing there imparting this information in a

hushed voice. K.'s uncle, already furious at having had to wait so long, whirled round

shouting: "Ill? You say he's ill?" and bore down almost threateningly on the man as if he

were the alleged illness in person. "The door has been opened," said the man, indicated the

lawyer's door, caught his dressing-gown about him, and disappeared. The door really was

open, a young girl -- K. recognized the dark, somewhat protuberant eyes -- was standing in

the entrance hall in a long white apron, holding a candle in her hand. "Next time he a little

smarter in opening the door," K.'s uncle threw at her instead of a greeting, while she

sketched a curtsy. "Come on, Joseph," he cried to K., who was slowly insinuating himself

past the girl. "Herr Huld is ill," said the girl, as K.'s uncle, without any hesitation, made

toward an inner door. K. was still glaring at the girl, who turned her back on him to bolt

the house door; she had a doll-like rounded face; not only were her pale cheeks and her

chin quite round in their modeling, but her temples and the line of her forehead as well.

"Joseph!" K.'s uncle shouted again, and he asked the girl: "Is it his heart?" "I think so," said

the girl, she had now found time to precede him with the candle and open the door of a

room. In one corner, which the candlelight had not yet reached, a face with a long beard

was raised from a pillow. "Leni, who is it?" asked the lawyer, who, blinded by the

candlelight, could not recognize his visitors. "It's your old friend Albert," said K.'s uncle.

"Oh, Albert," said the lawyer, sinking back on his pillow again, as if there were no need to

keep up appearances before this visitor. "Are you really in a bad way?" asked K.'s uncle,

sitting down on the edge of the bed. "I can't believe it. It's one of your heart attacks and it'll

pass over like all the others." "Maybe," said the lawyer in a faint voice, "but it's worse than

it's ever been before. I find it difficult to breathe, can't sleep at all, and am losing strength

daily." "I see," said K.'s uncle, pressing his panama hat firmly against his knee with his

huge hand. "That's bad news. But are you being properly looked after? And it's so gloomy in here, so dark. It's a long time since I was here last, but it looked more cheerful then. And

this little maid of yours doesn't seem to be very bright, or else she's concealing the fact."

The girl was still standing near the door with her candle; as far as one could make out from

the vague flicker of her eyes, she seemed to be looking at K. rather than at his uncle, even

while the latter was speaking about her. K. was leaning against a chair which he had

pushed near her. "When a man is as ill as I am," said the lawyer, "he must have quiet. I

don't find it gloomy." After a slight pause he added: "And Leni looks after me well, she's a

good girl." \* But this could not convince K.'s uncle, who was visibly prejudiced against

the nurse, and though he made no reply to the sick man he followed her with a stern eye as

she went over to the bed, set down the candle on the bedside table, bent over her patient,

and whispered to him while she rearranged the pillows. K.'s uncle, almost forgetting that

he was in a sick-room, jumped to his feet and prowled up and down behind the girl; K.

would not have been surprised if he had seized her by the skirts and dragged her away

from the bed. K. himself looked on with detachment, the illness of the lawyer was not

entirely unwelcome to him, he had not been able to oppose his uncle's growing ardor for

his cause, and he thankfully accepted the situation, which had deflected that ardor without

any connivance from him. Then his uncle, perhaps only with the intention of offending the

nurse, cried out: "Fräulein, please be so good as to leave us alone for a while; I want to

consult my friend on some personal business." The girl, who was still bending down over

the sick man smoothing the sheet beside the wall, merely turned her head and said quite

calmly, in striking contrast to the furious stuttering and frothing of K.'s uncle: "You see

that my master is ill; he cannot be consulted about business." She had probably reiterated

the phrase from sheer indolence; all the same it could have been construed as mockery

even by an unprejudiced observer, and K.'s uncle naturally flared up as if he had been

stung. "You damned --" he spluttered, but he was so furious as to be hardly intelligible. K.

started up in alarm, though he had expected some such outburst, and rushed over to his

uncle with the firm intention of clapping both hands over his mouth and so silencing him.

Fortunately the patient raised himself up in bed behind the girl. K.'s uncle made a wry

grimace as if he were swallowing some nauseous draught and he said in a smoother voice:

"I assure you we aren't altogether out of our senses; if what I ask were impossible I should

not ask it. Please go away now." The girl straightened herself beside the bed, turning full

toward K.'s uncle, but with one hand, at least so K. surmised, she was patting the lawyer's

hand. "You can discuss anything before Leni," said the lawyer in a voice of sheer entreaty.

"This does not concern myself," said K.'s uncle, "it is not my secret." And he turned away

as if washing his hands of the matter, although willing to give the lawyer a moment for

reconsideration. "Then whom does it concern ?" asked the lawyer in an exhausted voice,

lying down again. "My nephew," said K.'s uncle, "I have brought him here with me." And

he presented his nephew: Joseph K., Chief Clerk. "Oh," said the sick man with much more

animation, stretching out his hand to K., "forgive me, I didn't notice you. Go now, Leni,"

he said to the nurse, clasping her by the hand as if saying good-by to her for a long time,

and she went submissively enough. "So you haven't come," he said at last to K.'s uncle,

who was now appeased and had gone up to the bed again, "to pay me a sick visit; you've

come on business." It was as if the thought of a sick visit had paralyzed him until now, so rejuvenated did he look as he supported himself on his elbow, which must itself have been

something of a strain; and he kept combing with his fingers a strand of hair in the middle

of his beard. "You look much better already," said K.'s uncle, "since that witch went

away." He broke off, whispered: "I bet she's listening," and sprang to the door. But there

was no one behind the door and he returned again, not so much disappointed, since her

failure to listen seemed to him an act of sheer malice, as embittered. "You are unjust to

her," said the lawyer, without adding anything more in defense of his nurse; perhaps by

this reticence he meant to convey that she stood in no need of defense. Then in a much

more friendly tone he went on: "As for this case of your nephew's I should certainly

consider myself very fortunate if my strength proved equal to such an excessively arduous

task; I'm very much afraid that it will not do so, but at any rate I shall make every effort; if

I fail, you can always call in someone else to help me. To be quite honest, the case

interests me too deeply for me to resist the opportunity of taking some part in it. If my

heart does not hold out, here at least it will find a worthy obstacle to fail against." K. could

not fathom a single word of all this, he glanced at his uncle, hoping for some explanation,

but with the candle in his hand his uncle was sitting on the bedside table, from which a

medicine-bottle had already rolled on to the carpet, nodding assent to everything that the

lawyer said, apparently agreeing with everything and now and then casting a glance at K.

which demanded from him a like agreement. Could his uncle have told the lawyer all about

the case already? But that was impossible, the course of events ruled it out. "I don't

understand --" he therefore began. "Oh, perhaps I have misunderstood you?" asked the

lawyer, just as surprised and embarrassed as K. "Perhaps I have been too hasty. Then what

do you want to consult me about? I thought it concerned your case?" "Of course it does,"

said K.'s uncle, turning to K. with the question: "What's bothering you?" "Well, but how do

you come to know about me and my case?" asked K. "Oh, that's it," said the lawyer,

smiling. "I'm a lawyer, you see, I move in legal circles where all the various cases are

discussed, and the more striking ones are bound to stick in my mind, especially one that

concerns the nephew of an old friend of mine. Surely that's not so extraordinary." "What's

bothering you?" K.'s uncle repeated. "You're all nerves." "So you move in those legal



circles?" asked K. "Yes," replied the lawyer. "You ask questions like a child," said K.'s

uncle. "Whom should I associate with if not with men of my own profession?" added the

lawyer. It sounded incontrovertible and K. made no answer. "But you're attached to the

Court in the Palace of Justice, not to the one in the attics," he wanted to say, yet could not

bring himself actually to say it. "You must consider," the lawyer continued in the tone of

one perfunctorily explaining something that should be self-evident, "you must consider

that this intercourse enables me to benefit my clients in all sorts of ways, some of which

cannot even be divulged. Of course I'm somewhat handicapped now because of my illness,

but in spite of that, good friends of mine from the Law Courts visit me now and then and I

learn lots of things from them. Perhaps more than many a man in the best of health who

spends all his days in the Courts. For example, there's a dear friend of mine visiting me at

this very moment," and he waved a hand toward a dark corner of the room. "Where?"

asked K., almost rudely, in his first shock of astonishment. He looked round uncertainly;

the light of the small candle did not nearly reach the opposite wall. And then some form or other in the dark corner actually began to stir. By the light of the candle, which his uncle

now held high above his head, K. could see an elderly gentleman sitting there at a little

table. He must have been sitting without even drawing breath, to have remained for so long

unnoticed. Now he got up fussily, obviously displeased to have his presence made known.

With his hands, which he flapped like short wings, he seemed to be deprecating all

introductions or greetings, trying to show that the last thing he desired was to disturb the

other gentlemen, and that he only wanted to be transported again to the darkness where his

presence might be forgotten. But that privilege could no longer be his. "I may say you took

us by surprise," said the lawyer in explanation, and he waved his hand to encourage the

gentleman to approach, which he did very slowly and glancing around him hesitantly, but

with a certain dignity. "The Chief Clerk of the Court -- oh, I beg your pardon, I have not

introduced you -- this is my friend Albert K., this is his nephew Joseph K., and this is the

Chief Clerk of the Court -- who, to return to what I was saying, has been so good as to pay

me a visit. The value of such a visit can really be appreciated only by the initiated who

know how dreadfully the Clerk of the Court is overwhelmed with work. Yet he came to

see me all the same, we were talking here peacefully, as far as my ill health permitted, we

didn't actually forbid Leni to admit visitors, it was true, for we expected none, but we

naturally thought that we should be left in peace, and then came your furious tattoo, Albert,

and the Clerk of the Court withdrew into the corner with his chair and his table, but now it

seems we have the chance, that is, if you care to take it, of making the discussion general,

since this case concerns us all, and so we can get together. --Please, my dear Sir," he said

with a bow and an obsequious smile, indicating an armchair near the bed. "Unfortunately I

can only stay for a few minutes longer," said the Chief Clerk of the Court affably, seating

himself in the chair and looking at his watch, "my duties call me. But I don't want to miss

this opportunity of becoming acquainted with a friend of my friend here." He bowed

slightly to K.'s uncle, who appeared very flattered to make this new acquaintance, yet,

being by nature incapable of expressing reverent feelings, requited the Clerk of the Court's

words with a burst of embarrassed but raucous laughter. An ugly sight! K. could observe

everything calmly, for nobody paid any attention to him. The Chief Clerk of the Court,

now that he had been brought into prominence, seized the lead, as seemed to be his usual

habit. The lawyer, whose first pretense of weakness had probably been intended simply to

drive away his visitors, listened attentively, cupping his hand to his ear. K.'s uncle as

candle-bearer -- he was balancing the candle on his thigh, the lawyer often glanced at it in

apprehension -- had soon rid himself of his embarrassment and was now delightedly

absorbed in the Clerk of the Court's eloquence and the delicate wavelike gestures of the

hand with which he accompanied it. K., leaning against the bedpost, was completely

ignored by the Clerk of the Court, perhaps by deliberate intention, and served merely as an

audience to the old gentleman. Besides, he could hardly follow the conversation and was

thinking first of the nurse and the rude treatment she had received from his uncle, and then

wondering if he had not seen the Clerk of the Court before, perhaps actually among the

audience during his first interrogation. He might be mistaken, yet the Clerk of the Court

would have fitted excellently into the first row of the audience, the elderly gentlemen with

the brittle beards. Then a sound from the entrance hail as of breaking crockery made them all prick up

their ears. "I'll go and see what has happened," said K., and he went out, rather slowly, to

give the others a chance to call him back. Hardly had he reached the entrance hail and was

beginning to grope his way in the darkness, when a hand much smaller than his own

covered the hand with which he was still holding the door and gently drew the door shut. It

was the nurse, who had been waiting there. "Nothing has happened," she whispered. "I

simply flung a plate against the wall to bring you out." K. said in his embarrassment: "I

was thinking of you too." "That's all the better," said the nurse. "Come this way." A step or

two brought them to a door paneled with thick glass, which she opened. "In here," she said.

It was evidently the lawyer's office; as far as one could see in the moonlight, which

brilliantly lit up a small square section of the floor in front of each of the two large

windows, it was fitted out with solid antique furniture. "Here," said the nurse, pointing to a

dark chest with a carved wooden back. After he had sat down K. still kept looking round

the room, it was a lofty, spacious room, the clients of this "poor man's" lawyer must feel

lost in it. \* K. pictured to himself the timid, short steps with which they would advance

to the huge table. But then he forgot all this and had eyes only for the nurse, who was

sitting very close to him, almost squeezing him against the arm of the bench. "I thought,"

she said, "you would come out of your own accord, without waiting till I had to call you

out. A queer way to behave. You couldn't keep your eyes off me from the very moment

you came in, and yet you leave me to wait. And you'd better just call me Leni," she added

quickly and abruptly, as if there were not a moment to waste. "I'll be glad to," said K. "But

as for my queer behavior, Leni, that's easy to explain. in the first place I had to listen to

these old men jabbering. I couldn't simply walk out and leave them without any excuse,

and in the second place I'm not in the least a bold young man, but rather shy, to tell the

truth, and you too, Leni, really didn't look as if you were to be had for the asking." "It isn't

that," said Leni, laying her arm along the back of the seat and looking at K. "But you didn't

like me at first and you probably don't like me even now." "Liking is a feeble word," said

K. evasively. "Oh!" she said, with a smile, and K.'s remark and that little exclamation gave

her a certain advantage over him. So K. said nothing more for a while. As he had grown

used to the darkness in the room, he could now distinguish certain details of the

furnishings. He was particularly struck by a large picture which hung to the right of the

door, and bent forward to see it more clearly. It represented a man in a Judge's robe; he

was sitting on a high throne-like seat, and the gilding of the seat stood out strongly in the

picture. The strange thing was that the Judge did not seem to be sitting in dignified

composure, for his left arm was braced along the back and the side-arm of his throne,

while his right arm rested on nothing, except for the hand, which clutched the other arm of

the chair; it was as if in a moment he must spring up with a violent and probably wrathful

gesture to make some decisive observation or even to pronounce sentence. The accused

might be imagined as standing on the lowest step leading up to the chair of justice; the top

steps, which were covered with a yellowish carpet, were shown in the picture. "Perhaps

that is my Judge," said K., pointing with his finger at the picture. "I know him," said Leni,

and she looked at the picture too. "He often comes here. That picture was painted when he was young, but it could never have been in the least like him, for he's a small man, almost

a dwarf. Yet in spite of that he had himself drawn out to that length in the portrait, for he's

madly vain like everybody else here. But I'm a vain person, too, and very much upset that

you don't like me in the least." To this last statement K. replied merely by putting his arm

round her and drawing her to him; she leaned her head against his shoulder in silence. But

to the rest of her remarks he answered: "What's the man's rank?" "He is an Examining

Magistrate," she said, seizing the hand with which K. held her and beginning to play with

his fingers. "Only an Examining Magistrate again," said K. in disappointment. "The higher



officials keep themselves well hidden. But he's sitting in a chair of state."  
"That's all

invention," said Leni, with her face bent over his hand. "Actually he is  
sitting on a kitchen

chair, with an old horse-rug doubled under him. But must you eternally be  
brooding over

your case?" she queried slowly. "No, not at all," said K. "In fact I probably  
brood far too

little over it." "That isn't the mistake you make," said Leni. "You're too  
unyielding, that's

what I've heard." "Who told you that?" asked K.; he could feel her body  
against his breast

and gazed down at her rich, dark, firmly knotted hair. "I should give away  
too much if I

told you that," replied Leni. "Please don't ask me for names, take my  
warning to heart

instead, and don't be so unyielding in future, you can't fight against this  
Court, you must

confess to guilt. Make your confession at the first chance you get. Until you  
do that, there's

no possibility of getting out of their clutches, none at all. Yet even then you  
won't manage

it without help from outside, but you needn't trouble your head about that,  
I'll see to it

myself." "You know a great deal about this Court and the intrigues that  
prevail in it!" said

K., lifting her on to his knee, for she was leaning too heavily against him.  
"That's better,"

she said, making herself at home on his knee by smoothing her skirt and pulling her blouse

straight. Then she clasped both her hands round his neck, leaned back, and looked at him

for a long time. "And if I don't make a confession of guilt, then you can't help me?" K.

asked experimentally. "I seem to recruit women helpers," he thought almost in surprise;

"first Fräulein Bürstner, then the wife of the usher, and now this little nurse who appears to

have some incomprehensible desire for me. She sits there on my knee as if it were the only

right place for her !" "No," said Leni, shaking her head slowly, "then I can't help you. But

you don't in the least want my help, it doesn't matter to you, you're stiff-necked and never

will be convinced." After a while she asked: "Have you got a sweetheart?" "No," said K.

"Oh, yes, you have," she said. "Well, yes, I have," said K. "Just imagine it, I have denied

her existence and yet I am actually carrying her photograph in my pocket." At her entreaty

he showed her Elsa's photograph; she studied it, curled up on his knee. It was a snapshot

taken of Elsa as she was finishing a whirling dance such as she often gave at the cabaret,

her skirt was still flying round her like a fan, her hands were planted on her firm hips, and

with her chin thrown up she was laughing over her shoulder at someone who did not

appear in the photograph. "She's very tightly laced," said Leni, indicating the place where

in her opinion the tight-lacing was evident. "I don't like her, she's rough and clumsy. But

perhaps she's soft and kind to you, one might guess that from the photograph. Big strong

girls like that often can't help being soft and kind. But would she be capable of sacrificing

herself for you?" "No," said K. "She is neither soft nor kind, nor would she be capable of

sacrificing herself for me. And up till now I have demanded neither the one thing nor the other from her. In fact I've never even examined this photograph as carefully as you have."

"So she doesn't mean so very much to you," said Leni. "She isn't your sweetheart after all."

"Oh, yes," replied K. "I refuse to take back my words." "Well, granted that she's your

sweetheart," said Leni, "you wouldn't miss her very much, all the same, if you were to lose

her or exchange her for someone else, me, for instance?" "Certainly," said K., smiling,

"that's conceivable, but she has one great advantage over you, she knows nothing about my

case, and even if she knew she wouldn't bother her head about it. She wouldn't try to get

me to be less unyielding." "That's no advantage," said Leni. "If that's all the advantage she

has over me I shan't give up hope. Has she any physical defect?" "Any physical defect?"

asked K. "Yes," said Leni. "For I have a slight one. Look." She held up her right hand and

stretched out the two middle fingers, between which the connecting web of skin reached

almost to the top joint, short as the fingers were. In the darkness K. could not make out at

once what she wanted to show him, so she took his hand and made him feel it. "What a

freak of nature!" said K. and he added, when he had examined the whole hand: "What a

pretty little paw !" Leni looked on with a kind of pride while K. in astonishment kept

pulling the two fingers apart and then putting them side by side again, until at last he

kissed them lightly and let them go. "Oh !" she cried at once. "You have kissed me !" She

hastily scrambled up until she was kneeling openmouthed on his knees. K. looked up at her

almost dumfounded; now that she was so close to him she gave out a bitter exciting odor

like pepper; she clasped his head to her, bent over him, and bit and kissed him on the neck,

biting into the very hairs of his head. "You have exchanged her for me," she cried over and

over again. "Look, you have exchanged her for me after all !" Then her knees slipped, with

a faint cry she almost fell on the carpet, K. put his arms round her to hold her up and was

pulled down to her. "You belong to me now," she said.

"Here's the key of the door, come whenever you like," were her last words, and as he

took his leave a final aimless kiss landed on his shoulder. When he stepped out on to the

pavement a light rain was falling; he was making for the middle of the street so as perhaps

to catch a last glimpse of Leni at her window, but a car which was waiting before the

house and which in his distraction he had not even noticed suddenly emitted his uncle, who

seized him by the arms and banged him against the house door as if he wanted to nail him

there. "Joseph!" he cried, "how could you do it! You have damaged your case badly, which

was beginning to go quite well. You hide yourself away with a filthy little trollop, who is

obviously the lawyer's mistress into the bargain, and stay away for hours. You don't even

seek any pretext, you conceal nothing, no, you're quite open, you simply run off to her and

stay beside her. And all this time we three sit there, your uncle, who is doing his best for

you, the lawyer, who has to be won over to your side, above all the Chief Clerk of the

Court, a man of importance, who is actually in charge of your case at its present stage.

There we sit, consulting how to help you, I have to handle the lawyer circumspectly, and

the lawyer in turn the Clerk of the Court, and one might think you had every reason to give

me at least some support. Instead of which you absent yourself. You were away so long

that there was no concealing it; of course the two gentlemen, being men of the world,

didn't talk about it, they spared my feelings, but finally even they could no longer ignore it, and as they couldn't mention it they said nothing at all. We sat there for minutes on end in

complete silence, listening for you to come back at last. And all in vain. Finally the Chief

Clerk of the Court, who had stayed much longer than he intended, got up and said good

night, evidently very sorry for me without being able to help me, his kindness was really

extraordinary, he stood waiting for a while longer at the door before he left. And I was

glad when he went, let me tell you; by that time I felt hardly able to breathe. And the poor

sick lawyer felt it even more, the good man couldn't utter a word as I took leave of him. In

all probability you have helped to bring about his complete collapse and so hastened the

death of a man on whose good offices you are dependent. And you leave me, your uncle,

to wait here in the rain for hours and worry myself sick, just feel, I'm wet through and

through!" Chapter 7

Lawyer / Manufacturer / Painter

ONE winter morning -- snow was falling outside the window in a foggy dimness -- K. was

sitting in his office, already exhausted in spite of the early hour. To save his face before his

subordinates at least, he had given his clerk instructions to admit no one, on the plea that

he was occupied with an important piece of work. But instead of working he twisted in his

chair, idly rearranged the things lying on his writing-table, and then, without being aware

of it, let his outstretched arm rest on the table and went on sitting motionless with bowed

head.

The thought of his case never left him now. He had often considered whether it would

not be better to draw up a written defense and hand it in to the Court. In this defense he

would give a short account of his life, and when he came to an event of any importance

explain for what reasons he had acted as he did, intimate whether he approved or

condemned his way of action in retrospect, and adduce grounds for the condemnation or

approval. The advantages of such a written defense, as compared with the mere advocacy

of a lawyer who himself was not impeccable, were undoubted. K. had no idea what the

lawyer was doing about the case; at any rate it did not amount to much, it was more than a

month since Huld had sent for him, and at none of the previous consultations had K.

formed the impression that the man could do much for him. To begin with, he had hardly

cross-questioned him at all. And there were so many questions to put. To ask questions



was surely the main thing. K. felt that he could draw up all the necessary questions

himself. But the lawyer, instead of asking questions, either did all the talking or sat quite

dumb opposite him, bent slightly forward over his writing-table, probably because of his

hardness of hearing, stroking a strand of hair in the middle of his beard and gazing at the

carpet, perhaps at the very spot where K. had lain with Leni. Now and then he would give

K. some empty admonitions such as people hand out to children. Admonitions as useless

as they were wearisome, for which K. did not intend to pay a penny at the final reckoning.

After the lawyer thought he had humbled him sufficiently, he usually set himself to

encourage him slightly again. He had already, so he would relate, won many similar cases

either outright or partially. Cases which, though in reality not quite so difficult, perhaps, as

this one, had been outwardly still more hopeless. He had a list of these cases in a drawer of

his desk -- at this he tapped one of them -- but he regretted he couldn't show it, as it was a

matter of official secrecy. Nevertheless the vast experience he had gained through all these

cases would now redound to K.'s benefit. He had started on K.'s case at once, of course,

and the first plea was almost ready for presentation. That was very important, for the first

impression made by the Defense often determined the whole course of subsequent

proceedings. Though, unfortunately, it was his duty to warn K., it sometimes happened that

the first pleas were not read by the Court at all. They simply filed them among the other papers and pointed out that for the time being the observation and interrogation of the

accused were more important than any formal petition. If the petitioner pressed them, they

generally added that before the verdict was pronounced all the material accumulated,

including, of course, every document relating to the case, the first plea as well, would be

carefully examined. But unluckily even that was not quite true in most cases, the first plea

was often mislaid or lost altogether and, even if it were kept intact till the end, was hardly

ever read; that was of course, the lawyer admitted, merely a rumor. It was all very

regrettable, but not wholly without justification. K. must remember that the proceedings

were not public; they could certainly, if the Court considered it necessary, become public,

but the Law did not prescribe that they must be made public. Naturally, therefore, the legal

records of the case, and above all the actual charge-sheets, were inaccessible to the accused

and his counsel, consequently one did not know in general, or at least did not know with

any precision, what charges to meet in the first plea; accordingly it could be only by pure

chance that it contained really relevant matter. One could draw up genuinely effective and

convincing pleas only later on, when the separate charges and the evidence on which they

were based emerged more definitely or could be guessed at from the interrogations. In

such circumstances the Defense was naturally in a very ticklish and difficult position. Yet

that, too, was intentional. For the Defense was not actually countenanced by the Law, but

only tolerated, and there were differences of opinion even on that point, whether the Law

could be interpreted to admit such tolerance at all. Strictly speaking, therefore, none of the

counsels for the Defense was recognized by the Court, all who appeared before the Court

as councils being in reality merely in the position of pettifogging lawyers. That naturally

had a very humiliating effect on the whole profession, and the next time K. visited the Law

Court offices he should take a look at the lawyers' room, just for the sake of having seen it

once in his life. He would probably be horrified by the kind of people he found assembled

there. The very room, itself small and cramped, showed the contempt in which the Court

held them. It was lit only by a small skylight, which was so high up that if you wanted to

look out, you had to get some colleague to hoist you on his back, and even then the smoke

from the chimney close by choked you and blackened your face. To give only one more

example of the state the place was in -- there had been for more than a year now a hole in

the floor, not so big that you could fall through the floor, but big enough to let a man's leg

slip through. The lawyers' room was in the very top attic, so that if you stumbled through

the hole your leg hung down into the lower attic, into the very corridor where the clients

had to wait. It wasn't saying too much if the lawyers called these conditions scandalous.

Complaints to the authorities had not the slightest effect, and it was strictly forbidden for

the lawyers to make any structural repairs or alterations at their own expense. Still, there

was some justification for this attitude on the part of the authorities. They wanted to

eliminate defending counsel as much as possible; the whole onus of the Defense must be

laid on the accused himself. A reasonable enough point of view, yet nothing could be more

erroneous than to deduce from this that accused persons had no need of defending counsel

when appearing before this Court. On the contrary, in no other Court was legal assistance

so necessary. For the proceedings were not only kept secret from the general public, but

from the accused as well. Of course only so far as this was possible, but it had proved possible to a very great extent. For even the accused had no access to the Court records,

and to guess from the course of an interrogation what documents the Court had up its

sleeve was very difficult, particularly for an accused person, who was himself implicated

and had all sorts of worries to distract him. Now here was where defending counsel

stepped in. Generally speaking, he was not allowed to be present during the examination,

consequently he had to cross-question the accused immediately after an interrogation, if

possible at the very door of the Court of Inquiry, and piece together from the usually

confused reports he got anything that might be of use for the Defense. But even that was

not the most important thing, for one could not elicit very much in that way, though of

course here as elsewhere a capable man could elicit more than others. The most important

thing was counsel's personal connection with officials of the Court; in that lay the chief

value of the Defense. Now K. must have discovered from experience that the very lowest

grade of the Court organization was by no means perfect and contained venal and corrupt

elements, whereby to some extent a breach was made in the water-tight system of justice.

This was where most of the petty lawyers tried to push their way in, by bribing and

listening to gossip, in fact there had actually been cases of purloining documents, at least

in former times. It was not to be gainsaid that these methods could achieve for the moment

surprisingly favorable results for the accused, on which the petty lawyers prided

themselves, spreading them out as a lure for new clients, but they had no effect on the

further progress of the case, or only a bad effect. Nothing was of any real value but

respectable personal connections with the higher officials, that was to say higher officials

of subordinate rank, naturally. Only through these could the course of the proceedings be

influenced, imperceptibly at first, perhaps, but more and more strongly as the case went on.

Of course very few lawyers had such connections, and here K.'s choice had been a very

fortunate one. Perhaps only one or two other lawyers could boast of the same connections

as Dr. Huld. These did not worry their heads about the mob in the lawyers' room and had

nothing whatever to do with them. But their relations with the Court officials were all the

more intimate. It was not even necessary that Dr. Huld should always attend the Court,

wait in the Ante-room of the Examining Magistrates till they chose to appear, and be

dependent on their moods for earning perhaps a delusive success or not even that. No, as

K. had himself seen, the officials, and very high ones among them, visited Dr. Huld of

their own accord, voluntarily providing information with great frankness or at least in

broad enough hints, discussing the next turn of the various cases; more, even sometimes

letting themselves be persuaded to a new point of view. Certainly one should not rely too

much on their readiness to be persuaded, for definitely as they might declare themselves

for a new standpoint favorable to the Defense, they might well go straight to their offices

and issue a statement in the directly contrary sense, a verdict far more severe on the

accused than the original intention which they claimed to have renounced completely.

Against that, of course, there was no remedy, for what they said to you in private was

simply said to you in private and could not be followed up in public, even if the Defense

were not obliged for other reasons to do its utmost to retain the favor of these gentlemen.

On the other hand it had also to be considered that these gentlemen were not moved by

mere human benevolence or friendly feeling in paying visits to defending counsel -- only to experienced counsel, of course; they were in a certain sense actually dependent on the

Defense. They could not help feeling the disadvantages of a judiciary system which

insisted on secrecy from the start. Their remoteness kept the officials from being in touch



with the populace; for the average case they were excellently equipped, such a case

proceeded almost mechanically and only needed a push now and then; yet confronted with

quite simple cases, or particularly difficult cases, they were often utterly at a loss, they did

not have any right understanding of human relations, since they were confined day and

night to the workings of their judicial system, whereas in such cases a knowledge of

human nature itself was indispensable. Then it was that they came to the lawyers for

advice, with a servant behind them carrying the papers that were usually kept so secret. In

that window over there many a gentleman one would never have expected to encounter

had sat gazing out hopelessly into the street, while the lawyer at his desk examined his

papers in order to give him good advice. And it was on such occasions as these that one

could perceive how seriously these gentlemen took their vocation and how deeply they

were plunged into despair when they came upon obstacles which the nature of things kept

them from overcoming. In other ways, too, their position was not easy, and one must not

do them an injustice by regarding it as easy. The ranks of officials in this judiciary system

mounted endlessly, so that not even the initiated could survey the hierarchy as a whole.

And the proceedings of the Courts were generally kept secret from subordinate officials,

consequently they could hardly ever quite follow in their further progress the cases on

which they had worked; any particular case thus appeared in their circle of jurisdiction

often without their knowing whence it came, and passed from it they knew not whither.

Thus the knowledge derived from a study of the various single stages of the case, the final

verdict and the reasons for that verdict lay beyond the reach of these officials. They were

forced to restrict themselves to that stage of the case which was prescribed for them by the

Law, and as for what followed, in other words the results of their own work, they generally

knew less about it than the Defense, which as a rule remained in touch with the accused

almost to the end of the case. So in that respect, too, they could learn much that was worth

knowing from the Defense. Should it surprise K., then, keeping all this in mind, to find that

the officials lived in a state of irritability which sometimes expressed itself in offensive

ways when they dealt with their clients? That was the universal experience. All the

officials were in a constant state of irritation, even when they appeared calm. Naturally the

petty lawyers were most liable to suffer from it. The following story, for example, was

current, and it had all the appearance of truth. An old official, a well-meaning, quiet man,

had a difficult case in hand which had been greatly complicated by the lawyer's petitions,

and he had studied it continuously for a whole day and night -- the officials were really

more conscientious than anyone else. Well, toward morning, after twenty-four hours of

work with probably very little result, he went to the entrance door, hid himself behind it,

and flung down the stairs every lawyer who tried to enter. The lawyers gathered down

below on the landing and took counsel what they should do; on the one hand they had no

real claim to be admitted and consequently could hardly take any legal action against the

official, and also, as already mentioned, they had to guard against antagonizing the body of

officials. But on the other hand every day they spent away from the Court was a day lost to them, and so a great deal depended on their getting in. At last they all agreed that the best

thing to do was to tire out the 01(1 gentleman. one lawyer after another was sent rushing

upstairs to offer the greatest possible show of passive resistance and let himself be thrown

down again into the arms of his colleagues. That lasted for about an hour, then the old

gentleman -- who was exhausted in any case by his work overnight -- really grew tired and

went back to his office. The lawyers down below would not believe it at first and sent one

of their number up to peep behind the door and assure himself that the place was actually

vacant. Only then were they able to enter, and probably they did not dare even to grumble.

For although the pettiest lawyer might be to some extent capable of analyzing the state of

things in the Court, it never occurred to the lawyers that they should suggest or insist on

any improvements in the system, while -- and this was very characteristic -- almost every

accused man, even quite simple people among them, discovered from the earliest stages a

passion for suggesting reforms which often wasted time and energy that could have been

better employed in other directions. The only sensible thing was to adapt oneself to

existing conditions. Even if it were possible to alter a detail for the better here or there --

but it was simple madness to think of it -- any benefit arising from that would profit clients

in the future only, while one's own interests would be immeasurably injured by attracting

the attention of the ever-vengeful officials. Anything rather than that! One must lie low, no

matter how much it went against the grain, and try to understand that this great

organization remained, so to speak, in a state of delicate balance, and that if someone took

it upon himself to alter the disposition of things around him, he ran the risk of losing his

footing and falling to destruction, while the organization would simply right itself by some

compensating reaction in another part of its machinery -- since everything interlocked --

and remain unchanged, unless, indeed, which was very probable, it became still more rigid,

more vigilant, severer, and more ruthless. One must really leave the lawyers to do their

work, instead of interfering with them. Reproaches were not of much use, particularly

when the offender was unable to perceive the full scope of the grounds for them; all the

same, he must say that K. had very greatly damaged his case by his discourtesy to the

Chief Clerk of the Court. That influential man could already almost be eliminated from the

list of those who might be got to do something for K. He now ignored clearly on purpose

even the slightest reference to the case. In many ways the functionaries were like children.

Often they could be so deeply offended by the merest trifle -- unfortunately, K.'s behavior

could not be classed as a trifle -- that they would stop speaking even to old friends, give

them the cold shoulder, and work against them in all imaginable ways. But then, suddenly,

in the most surprising fashion and without any particular reason, they would be moved to

laughter by some small jest which you only dared to make because you felt you had

nothing to lose, and then they were your friends again. In fact it was both easy and difficult

to handle them, you could hardly lay down any fixed principles for dealing with them.

Sometimes you felt astonished to think that one single ordinary lifetime sufficed to gather

all the knowledge needed for a fair degree of success in such a profession.  
There were dark

hours, of course, such as came to everybody, in which you thought you had  
achieved

nothing at all, in which it seemed to you that only the cases predestined  
from the start to

succeed came to a good end, which they would have reached in any event  
without your help, while every one of the others was doomed to fail in spite  
of all your maneuvers, all

your exertions, all the illusory little victories on which you plumed yourself.  
That was a

frame of mind, of course, in which nothing at all seemed certain, and so you  
could not

positively deny when questioned that your intervention might have  
sidetracked some cases

which would have run quite well on the right lines had they been left alone.  
A desperate

kind of self-assurance, to be sure, yet it was the only kind available at such  
times. These

moods -- for of course they were only moods, nothing more -- afflicted  
lawyers more

especially when a case which they had conducted satisfactorily to the  
desired point was

suddenly taken out of their hands. That was beyond all doubt the worst  
thing that could

happen to a lawyer. Not that a client ever dismissed his lawyer from a case,  
such a thing

was not done, an accused man, once having briefed a lawyer, must stick to him whatever

happened. For how could he keep going by himself, once he had called in someone to help

him? So that never happened, but it did sometimes happen that the case took a turn where

the lawyer could no longer follow it. The case and the accused and everything were simply

withdrawn from the lawyer; then even the best connections with officials could no longer

achieve any result, for even they knew nothing. The case had simply reached the stage

where further assistance was ruled out, it was being conducted in remote, inaccessible

Courts, where even the accused was beyond the reach of a lawyer. Then you might come

home some day and find on your table all the countless pleas relating to the case, which



you had drawn up with such pains and such flattering hopes; they had been returned to you

because in the new stage of the trial they were not admitted as relevant; they were mere

waste paper. It did not follow that the case was lost, by no means, at least there was no

decisive evidence for such an assumption; you simply knew nothing more about the case

and would never know anything more about it. Now, very luckily, such occurrences were

exceptional, and even if K.'s case were a case of that nature, it still had a long way to go

before reaching that stage. For the time being, there were abundant opportunities for legal

labor, and K. might rest assured that they would be exploited to the uttermost. The first

plea, as before mentioned, was not yet handed in, but there was no hurry; far more

important were the preliminary consultations with the relevant officials, and they had

already taken place. With varying success, as must be frankly admitted. It would be better

for the time being not to divulge details which might have a bad influence on K. by elating

or depressing him unduly, yet this much could be asserted, that certain officials had

expressed themselves very graciously and had also shown great readiness to help, while

others had expressed themselves less favorably, but in spite of that had by no means

refused their collaboration. The result on the whole was therefore very gratifying, though

one must not seek to draw any definite conclusion from that, since all preliminary

negotiations began in the same way and only in the course of further developments did it

appear whether they had real value or not. At any rate nothing was yet lost, and if they

could manage to win over the Chief Clerk of the Court in spite of all that had happened --

various moves had already been initiated toward that end -- then, to use a surgeon's

expression, this could be regarded as a clean wound and one could await further

developments with an easy mind. In such and similar harangues K.'s lawyer was inexhaustible. He reiterated them every

time K. called on him. Progress had always been made, but the nature of the progress

could never be divulged. The lawyer was always working away at the first plea, but it had

never reached a conclusion, which at the next visit turned out to be an advantage, since the

last few days would have been very inauspicious for handing it in, a fact which no one

could have foreseen. If K., as sometimes happened, wearied out by the lawyer's volubility,

remarked that, even taking into account all the difficulties, the case seemed to be getting

on very slowly, he was met with the retort that it was not getting on slowly at all, although

they would have been much further on by now had K. come to the lawyer in time.

Unfortunately he had neglected to do so and that omission was likely to keep him at a

disadvantage, and not merely a temporal disadvantage, either.

The one welcome interruption to these visits was Leni, who always so arranged things

that she brought in the lawyer's tea while K. was present. She would stand behind K.'s

chair, apparently looking on, while the lawyer stooped with a kind of miserly greed over

his cup and poured out and sipped his tea, but all the time she was letting K. surreptitiously

hold her hand. There was total silence. The lawyer sipped, K. squeezed Leni's hand, and

sometimes Leni ventured to caress his hair. "Are you still here?" the lawyer would ask,

after he had finished. "I wanted to take the tea-tray away," Leni would answer, there would

follow a last handclasp, the lawyer would wipe his mouth and begin again with new energy

to harangue K.

Was the lawyer seeking to comfort him or to drive him to despair? K. could not tell,

but he soon held it for an established fact that his defense was not in good hands. It might

be all true, of course, what the lawyer said, though his attempts to magnify his own

importance were transparent enough and it was likely that he had never till now conducted

such an important case as he imagined K.'s to be. But his continual bragging of his

personal connections with the officials was suspicious. Was it so certain that he was

exploiting these connections entirely for K.'s benefit? The lawyer never forgot to mention

that these officials were subordinate officials, therefore officials in a very dependent

position, for whose advancement certain turns in the various cases might in all probability

be of some importance. Could they possibly employ the lawyer to bring about such turns in

the case, turns which were bound, of course, to be unfavorable to the accused? Perhaps

they did not always do that, it was hardly likely, there must be occasions on which they

arranged that the lawyer should score a point or two as a reward for his services, since it

was to their own interest for him to keep up his professional reputation. But if that were

really the position, into which category were they likely to put K.'s case, which, as the

lawyer maintained, was a very difficult, therefore important case, and had roused great

interest in the Court from the very beginning? There could not be very much doubt what

they would do. A clue was already provided by the fact that the first plea had not yet been

handed in, though the case had lasted for months, and that according to the lawyer all the

proceedings were still in their early stages, words which were obviously well calculated to

lull the accused and keep him in a helpless state, in order suddenly to overwhelm him with the verdict or at least with the announcement that the preliminary examination had been

concluded in his disfavor and the case handed over to higher authorities.

It was absolutely necessary for K. to intervene personally. In states of intense

exhaustion, such as he experienced this winter morning, when all these thoughts kept

running at random through his head, he was particularly incapable of resisting this

conviction. The contempt which he had once felt for the case no longer obtained. Had he

stood alone in the world he could easily have ridiculed the whole affair, though it was also

certain that in that event it could never have arisen at all. But now his uncle had dragged

him to this lawyer, family considerations had come in; his position was no longer quite

independent of the course the case took, he himself, with a certain inexplicable

complacency, had imprudently mentioned it to some of his acquaintances, others had come

to learn of it in ways unknown to him, his relations with Fräulein Bürstner seemed to

fluctuate with the case itself -- in short, he hardly had the choice now to accept the trial or

reject it, he was in the middle of it and must fend for himself. To give in to fatigue would

be dangerous.

Yet there was no need for exaggerated anxiety at the moment. In a relatively short

time he had managed to work himself up to his present high position in the Bank and to

maintain himself in that position and win recognition from everybody; surely if the

abilities which had made this possible were to be applied to the unraveling of his own case,

there was no doubt that it would go well. Above all, if he were to achieve anything, it was

essential that he should banish from his mind once and for all the idea of possible guilt.

There was no such guilt. This legal action was nothing more than a business deal such as

he had often concluded to the advantage of the Bank, a deal within which, as always

happened, lurked various dangers which must simply be obviated. The right tactics were to

avoid letting one's thoughts stray to one's own possible shortcomings, and to cling as

firmly as one could to the thought of one's advantage. From this standpoint the conclusion

was inevitable that the case must be withdrawn from Dr. Huld as soon as possible,

preferably that very evening. According to him that was something unheard of, it was true,

and very likely an insult, but K. could not endure that his efforts in the case should be

thwarted by moves possibly originating in the office of his own representative. Once the

lawyer was shaken off, the petition must be sent in at once and the officials be urged daily,

if possible, to give their attention to it. This would never be achieved by sitting meekly in

the attic lobby like the others with one's hat under the seat. K. himself, or one of the

women, or some other messenger must keep at the officials day after day and force them to

sit down at their desks and study K.'s papers instead of gaping out into the lobby through

the wooden rails. These tactics must be pursued unremittingly, everything must be

organized and supervised; the Court would encounter for once an accused man who knew

how to stick up for his rights.

Yet even though K. believed he could manage all this, the difficulty of drawing up the

petition seemed overwhelming. At one time, not more than a week ago, he had regarded the possibility of having to draw up his own plea with merely a slight feeling of shame; it

never even occurred to him that there might be difficulties in the way. He could remember

that one of those mornings, when he was up to his ears in work, he had suddenly pushed



everything aside and seized his jotting-pad with the idea of drafting the plan of such a plea

and handing it to Dr. Huld by way of egging him on, but just at that moment the door of

the Manager's room opened and the Assistant Manager came in laughing uproariously.

That had been a very painful moment for K., though, of course, the Assistant Manager had

not been laughing at the plea, of which he knew nothing, but at a funny story from the

Stock Exchange which he had just heard, a story which needed illustrating for the proper

appreciation of the point, so that the Assistant Manager, bending over the desk, took K.'s

pencil from his hand and drew the required picture on the page of the jotting-pad which

had been intended for the plea.

Today K. was no longer hampered by feelings of shame; the plea simply had to be

drawn up. If he could find no time for it in his office, which seemed very probable, then he

must draft it in his lodgings by night. And if his nights were not enough, then he must ask

for furlough. Anything but stop halfway, that was the most senseless thing one could do in

any affair, not only in business. No doubt it was a task that meant almost interminable

labor. One did not need to have a timid and fearful nature to be easily persuaded that the

completion of this plea was a sheer impossibility. Not because of laziness or obstructive

malice, which could only hinder Dr. Huld, but because to meet an unknown accusation, not

to mention other possible charges arising out of it, the whole of one's life would have to be

recalled to mind, down to the smallest actions and accidents, clearly formulated and

examined from every angle. And besides how dreary such a task would be! It would do

well enough, perhaps, as an occupation for one's second childhood in years of retirement,

when the long days needed filling up. But now, when K. should be devoting his mind

entirely to work, when every hour was hurried and crowded -- for he was still in full career

and rapidly becoming a rival even to the Assistant Manager -- when his evenings and

nights were all too short for the pleasures of a bachelor life, this was the time when he

must sit down to such a task! Once more his train of thought had led him into self-pity.

Almost involuntarily, simply to make an end of it, he put his finger on the button which

rang the bell in the waiting-room. While he pressed it he glanced at the clock. It was

eleven o'clock, he had wasted two hours in dreaming, a long stretch of precious time, and

he was, of course, still wearier than he had been before. Yet the time had not been quite

lost, he had come to decisions which might prove valuable. The attendants brought in

several letters and two cards from gentlemen who had been waiting for a considerable

time. They were, in fact, extremely important clients of the Bank who should on no

account have been kept waiting at all. Why had they come at such an unsuitable hour? --

and why, they might well be asking in their turn behind the door, did the assiduous K.

allow his private affairs to usurp the best time of the day? Weary of what had gone before

and wearily awaiting what was to come, K. got up to receive the first of his clients.

This was the jovial little man, a manufacturer whom K. knew well. He regretted having disturbed K. in the middle of important work and K. on his side regretted that he

had kept the manufacturer waiting for so long. But his very regret he expressed in such a

mechanical way, with such a lack of sincerity in his tone of voice, that the manufacturer

could not have helped noticing it, had he not been so engrossed by the business in hand. As

it was, he tugged papers covered with statistics out of every pocket, spread them before K.,

explained various entries, corrected a trifling error which his eye had caught even in this

hasty survey, reminded K. of a similar transaction which he had concluded with him about

a year before, mentioned casually that this time another bank was making great sacrifices

to secure the deal, and finally sat in eager silence waiting for K.'s comments. K. had

actually followed the man's argument quite closely in its early stages -- the thought of such

an important piece of business had its attractions for him too -- but unfortunately not for

long; he had soon ceased to listen and merely nodded now and then as the manufacturer's

claims waxed in enthusiasm, until in the end he forgot to show even that much interest and

confined himself to staring at the other's bald head bent over the papers and asking himself

when the fellow would begin to realize that all his eloquence was being wasted. When the

manufacturer stopped speaking, K. actually thought for a moment that the pause was

intended to give him the chance of confessing that he was not in a fit state to attend to

business. And it was with regret that he perceived the intent look on the manufacturer's

face, the alertness, as if prepared for every objection, which indicated that the interview

would have to continue. So he bowed his head as at a word of command and began slowly

to move his pencil point over the papers, pausing here and there to stare at some figure.

The manufacturer suspected K. of looking for flaws in the scheme, perhaps the figures

were merely tentative, perhaps they were not the decisive factors in the deal, at any rate he

laid his hand over them and shifting closer to K. began to expound the general policy

behind the transaction. "It's difficult," said K., pursing his lips, and now that the papers, the

only things he had to hold on to, were covered up, he sank weakly against the arm of his

chair. He glanced up slightly, but only slightly, when the door of the Manager's room

opened, disclosed the Assistant Manager, a blurred figure who looked as if veiled in some

kind of gauze. K. did not seek for the cause of this apparition, but merely registered its

immediate effect, which was very welcome to him. For the manufacturer at once bounded

from his chair and rushed over to the Assistant Manager, though K. could have wished him

to be ten times quicker, since he was afraid the apparition might vanish again. His fear was

superfluous, the two gentlemen met each other, shook hands, and advanced together

toward K.'s desk. The manufacturer lamented that his proposals were being coldshouldered

by the Chief Clerk, indicating K., who under the Assistant Manager's eye had

once more bent over the papers. Then as the two of them leaned against his desk, and the

manufacturer set himself to win the newcomer's approval for his scheme, it seemed to K.

as though two giants of enormous size were negotiating above his head about himself.

Slowly, lifting his eyes as far as he dared, he peered up to see what they were about, then

picked one of the documents from the desk at random, laid it flat on his open palm, and

gradually raised it, rising himself with it, to their level. In doing so he had no definite

purpose, but merely acted with the feeling that this was how he would have to act when he

had finished the great task of drawing up the plea which was to acquit him completely. The Assistant Manager, who was giving his full attention to the conversation, merely glanced

at the paper without even reading what was on it -- for anything that seemed important to

the Chief Clerk was unimportant to him -- took it from K.'s hand, said: "Thanks, I know all

that already," and quietly laid it back on the desk again. K. darted a bitter look at him, but

the Assistant Manager did not notice that, or, if he did, was only amused; he laughed

loudly several times, visibly disconcerted the manufacturer by a quick retort, only to

counter it immediately himself, and finally invited the man into his private office, where

they could complete the transaction together. "It is a very important proposal," he said to

the manufacturer, "I entirely agree. And the Chief Clerk" -- even in saying this he went on

addressing himself only to the manufacturer -- "will I am sure be relieved if we take it off

his shoulders. This business needs thinking over. And he seems to be overburdened today;

besides, there are some people who have been waiting for him in the anteroom for hours."

K. had still enough self- command to turn away from the Assistant Manager and address

his friendly but somewhat fixed smile solely to the manufacturer; except for this he did not

intervene, supporting himself with both hands on the desk, bending forward a little like an

obsequious clerk, and looked on while the two men, still talking away, gathered up the

papers and disappeared into the Manager's room. In the very doorway, the manufacturer

turned round to remark that he would not say good-by yet, for of course he would report

the result of the interview to the Chief Clerk; besides, there was another little matter he had

to mention.

At last K. was alone. He had not the slightest intention of interviewing any more

clients and vaguely realized how pleasant it was that the people waiting outside believed

him to be still occupied with the manufacturer, so that nobody, not even the attendant,

could disturb him. He went over to the window, perched on the sill, holding on to the latch

with one hand, and looked down on the square below. The snow was still falling, the sky

had not yet cleared.



For a long time he sat like this, without knowing what really troubled him, only

turning his head from time to time with an alarmed glance toward the anteroom, where he

fancied, mistakenly, that he heard a noise. But as no one came in he recovered his

composure, went over to the washbasin, washed his face in cold water, and returned to his

place at the window with a clearer mind. The decision to take his defense into his own

hands seemed now more grave to him than he had originally fancied. So long as the lawyer

was responsible for the case it had not come really home to him, he had viewed it with a

certain detachment and kept beyond reach of immediate contact with it, he had been able

to supervise it whenever he liked, but could also withdraw whenever he liked. Now, on the

other hand, if he were to conduct his own defense he would be putting himself completely

in the power of the Court, at least for the time being, a policy which would eventually

bring about his absolute and definite acquittal, but would meanwhile, provisionally at least,

involve him in far greater dangers than before. If he had ever doubted that, his state of

mind today in his encounter with the Assistant Manager and the manufacturer would have

been more than enough to convince him. What a stupor had overcome him, merely because he had decided to conduct his own defense! And what would develop later on? What days

were lying in wait for him? Would he ever find the right path through all these difficulties?

To put up a thoroughgoing defense -- and any other kind would be a waste of time -- to put

up a thoroughgoing defense, did that not involve cutting himself off from every other

activity? Would he be able to carry that through? And how was he to conduct his case

from a Bank office? It was not merely the drawing up of a plea; that might be managed on

a few weeks' furlough, though to ask for leave of absence just now would be decidedly

risky; but a whole trial was involved, whose duration it was impossible to foresee. What an

obstacle had suddenly arisen to block K.'s career!

And this was the moment when he was supposed to work for the Bank? He looked

down at his desk. This the time to interview clients and negotiate with them? While his

case was unfolding itself, while up in the attics the Court officials were poring over the

charge papers, was he to devote his attention to the affairs of the Bank? It looked like a

kind of torture sanctioned by the Court, arising from his case and concomitant with it. And

would allowances be made for his peculiar position when his work in the Bank came to be

judged? Never, and by nobody. The existence of his case was not entirely unknown in the

Bank, though it was not quite clear who knew of it and how much they knew. But

apparently the rumor had not yet reached the Assistant Manager, otherwise K. could hardly

have failed to perceive it, since the man would have exploited his knowledge without any

scruples as a colleague or as a human being. And the Manager himself? He was certainly

well disposed to K. and as soon as he heard of the case would probably be willing enough

to lighten K.'s duties as far as lay in his power, but his good intentions would be

checkmated, for K.'s waning prestige was no longer sufficient to counterbalance the

influence of the Assistant Manager, who was gaining a stronger hold on the Manager and

exploiting the latter's invalid condition to his own advantage. \* So what had K. to hope?

It might be that he was only sapping his powers of resistance by harboring these thoughts;

still, it was necessary to have no illusions and to view the position as clearly as the moment

allowed.

Without any particular motive, merely to put off returning to his desk, he opened the

window. It was difficult to open, he had to push the latch with both hands. Then there

came into the room through the great window a blend of fog and smoke, filling it with a

faint smell of burning soot. Some snowflakes fluttered in too. "An awful autumn," came

the voice of the manufacturer from behind K.; returning from his colloquy with the

Assistant Manager, he had entered the room unobserved. K. nodded and shot an

apprehensive glance at the man's attaché case, from which doubtless he would now extract

all his papers in order to inform K. how the negotiations had gone. But the manufacturer,

catching K.'s eye, merely tapped his attaché case without opening it and said: "You would

like to know how it has turned out? The final settlement is as good as in my pocket. A

charming fellow, your Assistant Manager, but dangerous to reckon with."  
He laughed and

shook K. by the hand, trying to make him laugh too. But now K.'s  
suspicions seized on the fact that the manufacturer had not offered to show  
him the papers, and he found nothing to

laugh at. "Herr K.," said the manufacturer, "you're under the weather today.  
You look so

depressed." "Yes," said K., putting his hand to his brow, "a headache, family  
troubles."

"Ah, yes," said the manufacturer, who was a hasty man and could never  
listen quietly to

anybody, "we all have our troubles." K. had involuntarily taken a step  
toward the door, as

if to show the manufacturer out, but the latter said: "Herr K., there's another  
little matter I

should mention to you. I'm afraid this isn't exactly the moment to bother  
you with it, but

the last two times I've been here I forgot to mention it. And if I put off  
mentioning it any

longer it will probably lose its point altogether. And that would be a pity,  
since my

information may have some real value for you." Before K. had time to  
make any reply the

man stepped up close to him, tapped him with one finger on the chest, and  
said in a low

voice: "You're involved in a case, aren't you?" K. started back, crying out:  
"The Assistant

Manager told you that." "Not at all," said the manufacturer. "How should the Assistant

Manager know anything about it?" "How do you know about it?" asked K., pulling himself

together. "I pick up scraps of information about the Court now and then," said the

manufacturer, "and that accounts for what I have to mention." "So many people seem to be

connected with the Court!" said K. with a bowed head, as he led the manufacturer back to

the desk. They sat down as before and the manufacturer began: "Unfortunately it isn't

much that I can tell you. But in these affairs one shouldn't leave the smallest stone

unturned. Besides, I feel a strong desire to help you, no matter how modest the help. We

have always been good business friends till now, haven't we? Well, then." K. wanted to

excuse himself for his behavior that morning, but the manufacturer would not hear of it,

pushed his attaché case firmly under his arm to show that he was in a hurry to go, and

continued: "I heard of your case from a man called Titorelli. He's a painter, Titorelli is only

his professional name, I don't know at all what his real name is. For years he has been in

the habit of calling at my office from time to time, bringing little paintings for which I give

him a sort of alms -- he's almost a beggar. And they're not bad pictures, moors and heaths

and so on. These deals -- we have got into the way of them -- pass off quite smoothly. But

there was a time when he turned up too frequently for my taste, I told him so, we fell into

conversation, I was curious to know how he could keep himself going entirely by his

painting, and I discovered to my astonishment that he really earned his living as a portrait

painter. He worked for the Court, he said. For what Court, I asked. And then he told me

about this Court. With your experience you can well imagine how amazed I was at the

tales he told me. Since then he brings me the latest news from the Court every time he

arrives, and in this way I have gradually acquired a considerable insight into its workings.

Of course Titorelli wags his tongue too freely, and I often have to put a stopper on him, not

only because he's certainly a liar, but chiefly because a business man like myself has so

many troubles of his own that he can't afford to bother much about other people's. That's

only by the way. Perhaps -- I thought to myself -- Titorelli might be of some use to you, he

knows many of the Judges, and even if he can hardly have much influence himself, he can

at least advise you how to get in touch with influential men. And even if you can't take him

as an oracle, still it seems to me that in your hands his information might become

important. For you are almost as good as a lawyer yourself. I'm always saying: The Chief Clerk is almost a lawyer. Oh, I have no anxiety about your case. Well, would you care to

go and see Titorelli? On my recommendation he will certainly do all he can for you; I

really think you should go. It needn't be today, of course, some time, any time will do. Let

me add that you needn't feel bound to go just because I advise you to, not in the least. No,

if you think you can dispense with Titorelli, it's certainly better to leave him entirely out of

it. Perhaps you've a detailed plan of your own already drawn up and Titorelli might spoil it.

Well, in that case you'd much better not go to see him. And it would certainly mean

swallowing one's pride to go to such a fellow for advice. Anyhow, do just as you like. Here

is my letter of recommendation and here is the address." K. took the letter, feeling dashed,



and stuck it in his pocket. Even in the most favorable circumstances the advantages which

this recommendation could procure him must be outweighed by the damage implied in the

fact that the manufacturer knew about his trial and that the painter was spreading news of

it. He could hardly bring himself to utter a few words of thanks to the manufacturer, who

was already on his way out. "I'll go to see the man," he said as he shook hands at the door,

"or write to him to call here, since I'm so busy." "I knew," said the manufacturer, "that you

could be depended on to find the best solution. Though I must say I rather thought you

would prefer to avoid receiving people like this Titorelli at the Bank, to discuss your case

with him. Besides, it's not always advisable to let such people get their hands on letters of

yours. But I'm sure you've thought it all over and know what you can do." K. nodded and

accompanied the manufacturer a stage farther, through the waiting-room. In spite of his

outward composure he was horrified at his own lack of sense. His suggestion of writing to

Titorelli had been made merely to show the manufacturer that he appreciated the

recommendation and meant to lose no time in making contact with the painter, but, left to

himself, he would not have hesitated to write to Titorelli had he regarded the man's

assistance as important. Yet it needed the manufacturer to point out the dangers lurking in

such an action. Had he really lost his powers of judgment to that extent already? If it were

possible for him to think of explicitly inviting a questionable character to the Bank in order

to ask for advice about his case with only a door between him and the Assistant Manager,

was it not also possible and even extremely probable that he was overlooking other

dangers as well, or blindly running into them? There wasn't always someone at his side to

warn him. And this was the moment, just when he intended to concentrate all his energies

on the case, this was the moment for him to start doubting the alertness of his faculties!

Must the difficulties he was faced with in carrying out his office work begin to affect the

case as well? At all events he simply could not understand how he could ever have thought

of writing to Titorelli and inviting him to come to the Bank.

He was still shaking his head over this when the attendant came up to him and

indicated three gentlemen sitting on a bench in the waiting-room. They had already waited

for a long time to see K. Now that the attendant accosted K. they sprang to their feet, each

one of them eager to seize the first chance of attracting K.'s attention. If the Bank officials

were inconsiderate enough to make them waste their time in the waiting-room, they felt

entitled in their turn to behave with the same lack of consideration. "Herr K.," one of them

began. But K. had sent for his overcoat and said to all three of them while the attendant helped him into it: "Forgive me, gentlemen, I'm sorry to tell you that I have no time to see

you at present. I do apologize, but I have to go out on urgent business and must leave the

building at once. You have seen for yourselves how long I have been held up by my last

caller. Would you be so good as to come back tomorrow or at some other time? Or could

we talk the matter over on the telephone, perhaps? Or perhaps you could inform me now,

briefly, what your business is, and I shall give you a detailed answer in writing? Though it

would certainly be much better if you made an appointment for some other time." These

suggestions threw the three men, whose time had thus been wasted to no purpose at all,

into such astonishment that they gazed at each other dumbly. "That's settled, then?" asked

K., turning to the attendant, who was bringing him his hat. Through the open door of his

room he could see that the snow was now falling more thickly. Consequently he put up his

coat-collar and buttoned it high round his neck.

At that very moment the Assistant Manager stepped out of the next room, glanced

smilingly at K. in his overcoat talking to the clients, and asked: "Are you going out, Herr

K.?" "Yes," said K., straightening himself, "I have to go out on business." But the Assistant

Manager had already turned to the three clients. "And these gentlemen?" he asked. "I

believe they have already been waiting a long time." "We have settled what we are to do,"

said K. But now the clients could no longer be held in check, they clustered round K.

protesting that they would not have waited for hours unless their business had been

important, not to say urgent, necessitating immediate discussion at length, and in private at

that. The Assistant Manager listened to them for a moment or two, meanwhile observing

K., who stood holding his hat and dusting it spasmodically, then he remarked: "Gentlemen,

there is a very simple solution. If you will accept me, I will gladly place myself at your

disposal instead of the Chief Clerk. Your business must, of course, be attended to at once.

We are businessmen like yourselves and know how valuable time is to a businessman.

Will you be so good as to come with me?" And he opened the door which led to the

waiting-room of his own office.

How clever the Assistant Manager was at poaching on the preserves which K. was

forced to abandon! But was not K. abandoning more than was absolutely needful? While

with the vaguest and -- he could not but admit it -- the faintest of hopes, he was rushing

away to see an unknown painter, his prestige in the Bank was suffering irreparable injury.

It would probably be much better for him to take off his overcoat again and conciliate at

least the two clients waiting next door for their turn to receive the Assistant Manager's

attention. K. might actually have attempted this if he had not at that moment caught sight

of the Assistant Manager himself in K.'s own room, searching through his files as if they

belonged to him. In great agitation K. approached the doorway of the room and the

Assistant Manager exclaimed: "Oh, you're not gone yet." He turned his face toward K. --

the deep lines scored upon it seemed to speak of power rather than old age -  
- and

immediately resumed his search. "I'm looking for a copy of an agreement," he said, "which

the firm's representative says should be among your papers. Won't you help me to look?"

K. took a step forward, but the Assistant Manager said: "Thanks, now I've found it," and carrying a huge package of documents, which obviously contained not only the copy of the

agreement but many other papers as well, he returned to his office.

"I'm not equal to him just now," K. told himself, "but once my personal difficulties

are settled he'll be the first to feel it, and I'll make him suffer for it, too." Somewhat

soothed by this thought, K. instructed the attendant, who had been holding open the

corridor door for a long time, to inform the Manager at any convenient time that he had

gone out on a business call, and then, almost elated at the thought of being able to devote

himself entirely to his case for a while, he left the Bank.

"He drove at once to the address where the painter lived, in a suburb which was

almost at the diametrically opposite end of the town from the offices of the Court. This

was an even poorer neighborhood, the houses were still darker, the streets filled with

sludge oozing about slowly on top of the melting snow. In the tenement where the painter

lived only one wing of the great double door stood open, and beneath the other wing, in the

masonry near the ground, there was a gaping hole out of which, just as K. approached,

issued a disgusting yellow fluid, steaming hot, from which some rats fled into the

adjoining canal. At the foot of the stairs an infant lay face down on the ground bawling,

but one could scarcely hear its shrieks because of the deafening din that came from a

tinsmith's workshop at the other side of the entry. The door of the workshop was open;

three apprentices were standing in a half-circle round some object on which they were

beating with their hammers. A great sheet of tin hanging on the wall cast a pallid light,

which fell between two of the apprentices and lit up their faces and aprons. K. flung only a

fleeting glance at all this, he wanted to finish off here as quickly as possible, he would

merely ask the painter a few searching questions and return at once to the Bank. His work

at the Bank for the rest of the day would benefit should he have any luck at all on this visit.

When he reached the third floor he had to moderate his pace, he was quite out of breath,

both the stairs and the stories were disproportionately high, and the painter was said to live

quite at the top, in an attic. The air was stifling; there was no well for these narrow stairs,

which were enclosed on either side by blank walls, showing only at rare intervals a tiny

window very high up. Just as K. paused to take breath, several young girls rushed out of

one of the flats and laughingly raced past him up the stairs. K. slowly followed them,

catching up with one who had stumbled and been left behind, and as they ascended

together he asked her: "Does a painter called Titorelli live here?" The girl, who was



slightly hunchbacked and seemed scarcely thirteen years old, nudged him with her elbow

and peered up at him knowingly. Neither her youth nor her deformity had saved her from

being prematurely debauched. She did not even smile, but stared unwinkingly at K. with

shrewd, bold eyes. K. pretended not to have noticed her behavior and asked: "Do you

know the painter Titorelli?" She nodded and asked in her turn: "What do you want him

for?" K. thought it a good chance to find out a little more about Titorelli while he still had

time: "I want him to paint my portrait," he said. "To paint your portrait?" she repeated,

letting her jaw fall open, then she gave K. a little slap as if he had said something

extraordinarily unexpected or stupid, lifted her abbreviated skirts with both hands, and raced as fast as she could after the other girls, whose shrieks were already dying away in

the distance. Yet at the very next turn of the stair K. ran into all of them. Obviously the

hunchback had reported K.'s intention, and they were waiting there for him. They stood

lined up on either side of the stairway, squeezing against the walls to leave room for K. to

pass, and smoothing their skirts down with their hands. All their faces betrayed the same

mixture of childishness and depravity which had prompted this idea of making him run the

gauntlet between them. At the top end of the row of girls, who now closed in behind K.

with spurts of laughter, stood the hunchback ready to lead the way. Thanks to her, he was

able to make straight for the right door. He had intended to go on up the main stairs, but

she indicated a side-stair that branched off toward Titorelli's dwelling. This stairway was

extremely narrow, very long, without any turning, could thus be surveyed in all its length,

and was abruptly terminated by Titorelli's door. In contrast to the rest of the stairway this

door was relatively brightly lit by a little fan-light set on an angle above it, and was made

of unpainted planks on which sprawled the name Titorelli in red, traced in sweeping brushstrokes.

K. with his escort was hardly more than halfway up the stairs when someone

above, obviously disturbed by the clatter of so many feet, opened the door a little way, and

a man who seemed to be wearing nothing but a nightshirt appeared in the opening. "Oh!"

he cried when he saw the approaching mob, and promptly vanished. The hunchback

clapped her hands in joy, and the other girls crowded K. from behind to urge him on faster.

Yet they were still mounting toward the top when the painter flung the door wide

open and with a deep bow invited K. to enter. As for the girls, he turned them off, he

would not admit one of them, eagerly as they implored and hard as they tried to enter by

force if not by permission. The hunchback alone managed to slip in under his outstretched

arm, but he rushed after her, seized her by the skirts, whirled her once round his head, and

then set her down before the door among the other girls, who had not dared meanwhile,

although he had quitted his post, to cross the threshold. K. did not know what to make of

all this, for they seemed to be on the friendliest terms together. The girls outside the door,

craning their necks behind one another, shouted various jocular remarks at the painter

which K. did not understand, and the painter was laughing too as he almost hurled the

hunchback through the air. Then he shut the door, bowed once more to K., held out his

hand, and said in introduction: "I'm the painter Titorelli." K. pointed at the door, behind

which the girls were whispering, and said: "You seem to be a great favorite here." "Oh,

those brats !" said the painter, trying unsuccessfully to button his nightshirt at the neck. He

was barefooted and besides the nightshirt had on only a pair of wide-legged yellow linen

trousers girt by a belt with a long end flapping to and fro. "Those brats are a real nuisance,"

he went on, while he desisted from fiddling with his nightshirt -- since the top button had

just come off -- fetched a chair, and urged K. to sit down. "I painted one of them once --

not any of those you saw -- and since then they've all persecuted me. When I'm here

myself they only come in if I let them, but whenever I go away there's always at least one

of them here. They've had a key made for my door, and they lend it round. You can hardly

imagine what a nuisance that is. For instance, if I bring a lady here whom I want to paint, I

unlock the door with my own key and find, say, the hunchback over there at the table, reddening her lips with my paint brushes, while her little sisters, who she's supposed to

keep an eye on, are scampering over the whole place and messing up every corner of the

room. Or, and this actually happened last night, I come home very late -- by the way, that's

why I'm in this state of disrepair, and the room too, please excuse it -- I come home late,

then, and start climbing into bed and something catches me by the leg; I look under the bed

and haul out another of these pests. Why they should make such a set at me I don't know,

you must have noticed yourself that I don't exactly encourage them. And, of course, all this

disturbs me in my work. If it hadn't been that I have free quarters in this studio I should

have cleared out long ago." Just then a small voice piped behind the door with anxious

cajolery: "Titorelli, can we come in now?" "No," replied the painter. "Not even me?" the

voice asked again. "Not even you," said the painter, and he went to the door and locked it.

Meanwhile K. had been looking round the room; it would never have occurred to him

that anyone could call this wretched little hole a studio. You could scarcely take two

strides in any direction. The whole room, floor, walls, and ceiling, was a box of bare

wooden planks with cracks showing between them. Opposite K., against a wall, stood a

bed with a variegated assortment of coverings. In the middle of the room an easel

supported a canvas covered by a shirt whose sleeves dangled on the floor.  
Behind K. was

the window, through which in the fog one could not see farther than the  
snow-covered roof

of the next house.

The turning of the key in the lock reminded K. that he had not meant to stay  
long.

Accordingly he fished the manufacturer's letter from his pocket, handed it  
to the painter,

and said: "I heard of you from this gentleman, an acquaintance of yours,  
and have come

here at his suggestion." The painter hastily read the letter through and threw  
it on the bed.

If the manufacturer had not so explicitly claimed acquaintance with Titorelli  
as a poor man

dependent on his charity, one might actually have thought that Titorelli did  
not know the

manufacturer or at least could not remember him. On top of this he now  
asked: "Have you

come to buy pictures or to have your portrait painted?" K. stared at him in  
amazement.

What could have been in the letter? He had assumed as a matter of course  
that the

manufacturer would tell Titorelli that he had come for no other purpose than  
to inquire

about his case. He had been altogether too rash and reckless in rushing to this man. But he

must make a relevant reply of some kind, and so he said with a glance at the easel: "You're

working on a painting just now?" "Yes," said Titorelli, stripping the shirt from the easel

and throwing it on the bed after the letter. "It's a portrait. A good piece of work, but not

quite finished yet." K. was apparently in luck, the opportunity to mention the Court was

being literally thrown at his head, for this was obviously the portrait of a Judge. Also it

strikingly resembled the portrait hanging in the lawyer's office. True, this was quite a

different Judge, a stout man with a black bushy beard which reached far up on his cheeks

on either side; moreover the other portrait was in oils, while this was lightly and

indistinctly sketched in pastel. Yet everything else showed a close resemblance, for here

too the Judge seemed to be on the point of rising menacingly from his high seat, bracing

himself firmly on the arms of it. "That must be a Judge," K. felt like saying at once, but he checked himself for the time being and approached the picture as if he wished to study the

detail. A large figure rising in the middle of the picture from the high back of the chair he

could not identify, and he asked the painter whom it was intended to represent. It still

needed more detail, the painter replied, and fetched a crayon from a table, armed with

which he worked a little at the outline of the figure, but without making it any more

recognizable to K. "It is Justice," said the painter at last. "Now I can recognize it," said K.

"There's the bandage over the eyes, and here are the scales. But aren't there wings on the

figure's heels, and isn't it flying?" "Yes," said the painter, "my instructions were to paint it

like that; actually it is Justice and the goddess of Victory in one." "Not a very good

combination, surely," said K., smiling. "Justice must stand quite still, or else the scales will

waver and a just verdict will become impossible." "I had to follow my client's

instructions," said the painter. "Of course," said K., who had not wished to give any

offense by his remark. "You have painted the figure as it actually stands above the high

seat." "No," said the painter, "I have neither seen the figure nor the high seat, that is all

invention, but I am told what to paint and I paint it." "How do you mean?" asked K.,



deliberately pretending that he did not understand. "It's surely a Judge sitting on his seat of

justice?" "Yes," said the painter, "but it is by no means a high Judge and he has never sat

on such a seat in his life." "And yet he has himself painted in that solemn posture? Why, he

sits there as if he were the actual President of the Court." "Yes, they're very vain, these

gentlemen," said the painter. "But their superiors give them permission to get themselves

painted like that. Each one of them gets precise instructions how he may have his portrait

painted. Only you can't judge the detail of the costume and the seat itself from this picture,

unfortunately, pastel is really unsuited for this kind of thing." "Yes," said K., "it's curious

that you should have used pastel." "My client wished it," said the painter, "he intends the

picture for a lady." The sight of the picture seemed to have roused his ardor, he rolled up

his shirt-sleeves, took several crayons in his hand, and as K. watched the delicate crayonstrokes

a reddish shadow began to grow round the head of the Judge, a shadow which

tapered off in long rays as it approached the edge of the picture. This play of shadow bit by

bit surrounded the head like a halo or a high mark of distinction. But the figure of Justice

was left bright except for an almost imperceptible touch of shadow; that brightness brought

the figure sweeping right into the foreground and it no longer suggested the goddess of

Justice, or even the goddess of Victory, but looked exactly like a goddess of the Hunt in

full cry. The painter's activities absorbed K. against his will, and in the end he began to

reproach himself for having stayed so long without even touching on the business that

brought him. "What is the name of this Judge?" he asked suddenly. "I'm not allowed to

tell," replied the painter, stooping over the picture and ostentatiously ignoring the guest

whom at first he had greeted with such consideration. K. put this down to caprice and was

annoyed that his time should be wasted in such a manner. "You're in the confidence of the

Court, I take it?" he asked. The painter laid down his crayons at once, straightened himself,

rubbed his hands, and looked at K. with a smile. "Come out with the truth," he said. "You

want to find out something about the Court, as your letter of recommendation told me, I

may say, and you started talking about my paintings only to win me over.  
But I don't take

that ill, you could hardly know that that wasn't the right way to tackle me.  
Oh, please don't apologize!" he said sharply, as K. tried to make some  
excuse. And then he continued:

"Besides, you were quite right in what you said; I am in the confidence of  
the Court." He

paused, as if he wanted to give K. time to digest this fact. Now they could  
hear the girls

behind the door again. They seemed to be crowding round the keyhole,  
perhaps they could

see into the room through the cracks in the door as well. K. abandoned any  
attempt at

apology, for he did not want to deflect the conversation, nor did he want the  
painter to feel

too important, and so become in a sense inaccessible, accordingly he asked:  
"Is your

position an official appointment?" "No," said the painter curtly, as if the  
question had cut

him short. K., being anxious to keep him going, said: "Well, such  
unrecognized posts often

carry more influence with them than the official ones." "That is just how it  
is with me,"

said the painter, knitting his brow and nodding. "The manufacturer  
mentioned your case to

me yesterday, he asked me if I wouldn't help you; I said to him: `Let the  
man come and see

me some time,' and I'm delighted to see you here so soon. The case seems to lie very near

your heart, which, of course, is not in the least surprising. Won't you take off your coat for

a moment?" Although K. had it in mind to stay only for a short time, this request was very

welcome to him. He had begun to feel the air in the room stifling, several times already he

had eyed with amazement a little iron stove in the corner which did not seem even to be

working; the sultry heat in the place was inexplicable. He took off his overcoat,

unbuttoning his jacket as well, and the painter said apologetically: "I must have warmth.

It's very cozy in here, isn't it? I'm well enough off in that respect." K. said nothing to this,

for it was not the warmth that made him so uncomfortable, it was rather the stuffy,

oppressive atmosphere; the room could not have been aired for a long time. His discomfort

was still more intensified when the painter begged him to sit down on the bed, while he

himself took the only chair in the room, which stood beside the easel. Titorelli also seemed

to misunderstand K.'s reasons for sitting on the extreme edge of the bed, he urged him to

make himself comfortable and actually pushed the reluctant K. deep down among the

bedclothes and pillows. Then he returned to his chair again and at last put his first serious

question, which made K. forget everything else. "Are you innocent?" he asked. "Yes," said

K. The answering of this question gave him a feeling of real pleasure, particularly as he

was addressing a private individual and therefore need fear no consequences. Nobody else

had yet asked him such a frank question. To savor his elation to the full, he added: "I am

completely innocent." "I see," said the painter, bending his head as if in thought. Suddenly

he raised it again and said: "If you are innocent, then the matter is quite simple." K.'s eyes

darkened, this man who said he was in the confidence of the Court was talking like an

ignorant child. "My innocence doesn't make the matter any simpler," said K. But after all

he could not help smiling, and then he slowly shook his head. "I have to fight against

countless subtleties in which the Court indulges. And in the end, out of nothing at all, an

enormous fabric of guilt will be conjured up." "Yes, yes, of course," said the painter, as if

K. were needlessly interrupting the thread of his ideas. "But you're innocent all the same?"

"Why, yes," said K. "That's the main thing," said the painter. He was not to be moved by

argument, yet in spite of his decisiveness it was not clear whether he spoke out of

conviction or out of mere indifference. K. wanted first to be sure of this, so he said: "You

know the Court much better than I do, I feel certain, I don't know much more about it than what I've heard from all sorts and conditions of people. But they all agree on one thing,

that charges are never made frivolously, and that the Court, once it has brought a charge

against someone, is firmly convinced of the guilt of the accused and can be dislodged from

that conviction only with the greatest difficulty." "The greatest difficulty?" cried the

painter, flinging one hand in the air. "The Court can never be dislodged from that

conviction. If I were to paint all the Judges in a row on one canvas and you were to plead

your case before it, you would have more hope of success than before the actual Court." "I

see," said K. to himself, forgetting that he merely wished to pump the painter.

Again a girl's voice piped from behind the door: "Titorelli, won't he be going away

soon now?" "Quiet, there!" cried the painter over his shoulder. "Can't you see that I'm

engaged with this gentleman?" But the girl, not to be put off, asked: "Are you going to

paint him?" And when the painter did not reply she went on: "Please don't paint him, such

an ugly man as that." The others yelled agreement in a confused jabbering. The painter

made a leap for the door, opened it a little -- K. could see the imploring, outstretched,

clasped hands of the girls -- and said: "If you don't stop that noise I'll fling you all down

the stairs. Sit down here on the steps and see that you keep quiet." Apparently they did not

obey him at once, for he had to shout in an imperious voice: "Down with you on the steps

!" After that all was still.

"Excuse me," said the painter, returning to K. again. K. had scarcely glanced toward

the door, he had left it to the painter to decide whether and in what manner he was to be

protected. Even now he scarcely made a movement when the painter bent down to him and

whispered in his ear, so that the girls outside might not hear: "These girls belong to the

Court too." "What?" cried K., screwing his head round to stare at the painter. But Titorelli

sat down again on his chair and said half in jest, half in explanation: "You see, everything

belongs to the Court." "That's something I hadn't noticed," said K. shortly; the painter's

general statement stripped his remark about the girls of all its disturbing significance. Yet

K. sat gazing for some time at the door, behind which the girls were now sitting quietly on

the stairs. One of them had thrust a blade of straw through a crack between the planks and

was moving it slowly up and down.

"You don't seem to have any general idea of the Court yet," said the painter,

stretching his legs wide in front of him and tapping with his shoes on the floor. "But since

you're innocent you won't need it anyhow. I shall get you off all by myself." "How can you

do that?" asked K. "For you told me yourself a few minutes ago that the Court was quite

impervious to proof." "Impervious only to proof which one brings before the Court," said

the painter, raising one finger as if K. had failed to perceive a fine distinction. "But it is

quite a different matter with one's efforts behind the scenes; that is, in the consultingrooms,



in the lobbies or, for example, in this very studio." What the painter now said no

longer seemed incredible to K., indeed it agreed in the main with what he had heard from

other people. More, it was actually hopeful in a high degree. If a judge could really be so

easily influenced by personal connections as the lawyer insisted, then the painter's connections with these vain functionaries were especially important and certainly not to be

undervalued. That made the painter an excellent recruit to the ring of helpers which K. was

gradually gathering round him. His talent for organization had once been highly praised in

the Bank, and now that he had to act entirely on his own responsibility this was his chance

to prove it to the uttermost. Titorelli observed the effect his words had produced upon K.

and then said with a slight uneasiness: "Perhaps it strikes you that I talk almost like a

jurist? It's my uninterrupted association with the gentlemen of the Court that has made me

grow like that. I have many advantages from it, of course, but I'm losing a great deal of my

élan as an artist." "How did you come in contact with the Judges to begin with?" asked K.;

he wanted to win the painter's confidence first, before actually enlisting him in his service.

"That was quite simple," said the painter. "I inherited the connection. My father was the

Court painter before me. It's a hereditary post. New people are of no use for it. There are so

many complicated and various and above all secret rules laid down for the painting of the

different grades of functionaries that a knowledge of them is confined to certain families.

Over there in that drawer, for instance, I keep all my father's drawings, which I never show

to anyone. And only a man who has studied them can possibly paint the Judges. Yet even

if I were to lose them, I have enough rules tucked away in my head to make my post secure

against all comers. For every Judge insists on being painted as the great old Judges were

painted, and nobody can do that but me." "Yours is an enviable situation," said K., who

was thinking of his own post in the Bank. "So your position is unassailable?" "Yes,

unassailable," replied the painter, proudly bracing his shoulders. "And for that reason, too,

I can venture to help a poor man with his trial now and then." "And how do you do it?"

asked K., as if it were not himself who had just been described as a poor man. But Titorelli

refused to be sidetracked and went on: "In your case, for instance, as you are completely

innocent, this is the line I shall take." The repeated mention of his innocence was already

making K. impatient. At moments it seemed to him as if the painter were offering his help

on the assumption that the trial would turn out well, which made his offer worthless. But in

spite of his doubts K. held his tongue and did not interrupt the man. He was not prepared to

renounce Titorelli's assistance, on that point he was decided; the painter was no more

questionable as an ally than the lawyer. Indeed he very much preferred the painter's offer

of assistance, since it was made so much more ingenuously and frankly.

Titorelli drew his chair closer to the bed and continued in a low voice: "I forgot to ask

you first what sort of acquittal you want. There are three possibilities, that is, definite

acquittal, ostensible acquittal, and indefinite postponement. Definite acquittal is, of course,

the best, but I haven't the slightest influence on that kind of verdict. As far as I know, there

is no single person who could influence the verdict of definite acquittal. The only deciding

factor seems to be the innocence of the accused. Since you're innocent, of course it would

be possible for you to ground your case on your innocence alone. But then you would

require neither my help nor help from anyone."

This lucid explanation took K. aback at first, but he replied in the same subdued voice

as the painter: "It seems to me that you're contradicting yourself." "In what way?" asked the painter patiently, leaning back with a smile. The smile awoke in K. a suspicion that he

was now about to expose contradictions not so much in the painter's statements as in the

Court procedure itself. However, he did not retreat, but went on: "You made the assertion

earlier that the Court is impervious to proof, later you qualified that assertion by confining

it to the public sessions of the Court, and now you actually say that an innocent man

requires no help before the Court. That alone implies a contradiction. But, in addition, you

said at first that the Judges can be moved by personal intervention, and now you deny that

definite acquittal, as you call it, can ever be achieved by personal intervention. In that lies

the second contradiction." "These contradictions are easy to explain," said the painter. "We

must distinguish between two things: what is written in the Law, and what I have

discovered through personal experience; you must not confuse the two. In the code of the

Law, which admittedly I have not read, it is of course laid down on the one hand that the

innocent shall be acquitted, but it is not stated on the other hand that the Judges are open to

influence. Now, my experience is diametrically opposed to that. I have not met one case of

definite acquittal, and I have met many cases of influential intervention. It is possible, of

course, that in all the cases known to me there was none in which the accused was really

innocent. But is not that improbable? Among so many cases no single case of innocence?

Even as a child I used to listen carefully to my father when he spoke of cases he had heard

about; the Judges, too, who came to his studio were always telling stories about the Court,

in our circle it is in fact the sole topic of discussion; no sooner did I get the chance to

attend the Court myself than I took full advantage of it; I have listened to countless cases

in their most crucial stages, and followed them as far as they could be followed, and yet --

I must admit it -- I have never encountered one case of definite acquittal."  
"Not one case of

acquittal, then," said K. as if he were speaking to himself and his hopes,  
"but that merely

confirms the opinion that I have already formed of this Court. It is a  
pointless institution

from any point of view. A single executioner could do all that is needed."  
"You mustn't

generalize," said the painter in displeasure. "I have only quoted my own  
experience."

"That's quite enough," said K. "Or have you ever heard of acquittals in  
earlier times?"

"Such acquittals," replied the painter, "are said to have occurred. Only it is  
very difficult to

prove the fact. The final decisions of the Court are never recorded, even the  
Judges can't

get hold of them, consequently we have only legendary accounts of ancient  
cases. These

legends certainly provide instances of acquittal; actually the majority of  
them are about

acquittals, they can be believed, but they cannot be proved. All the same,  
they shouldn't be

entirely left out of account, they must have an element of truth in them, and  
besides they

are very beautiful. I myself have painted several pictures founded on such  
legends." "Mere

legends cannot alter my opinion, said K., "and I fancy that one cannot appeal to such

legends before the Court?" The painter laughed. "No, one can't do that," he said. "Then

there's no use talking about them," said K., willing for the time being to accept the painter's

opinions, even where they seemed improbable or contradicted other reports he had heard.

He had no time now to inquire into the truth of all the painter said, much less contradict it,

the utmost he could hope to do was to get the man to help him in some way, even should

the help prove inconclusive. Accordingly he said: "Let us leave definite acquittal out of

account, then; you mentioned two other possibilities as well." "Ostensible acquittal and postponement. These are the only possibilities," said the painter. "But won't you take off

your jacket before we go on to speak of them? You look very hot." "Yes," said K., who

had been paying no attention to anything but the painter's expositions, but now that he was

reminded of the heat found his forehead drenched in sweat. "It's almost unbearable." The

painter nodded as if he comprehended K.'s discomfort quite well. "Couldn't we open the

window?" asked K. "No," replied the painter. "It's only a sheet of glass let into the roof, it

can't be opened." Now K. realized that he had been hoping all the time that either the

painter or he himself would suddenly go over to the window and fling it open. He was

prepared to gulp down even mouthfuls of fog if he could only get air. The feeling of being

completely cut off from the fresh air made his head swim. He brought the flat of his hand

down on the feather bed and said in a feeble voice: "That's both uncomfortable and

unhealthy." "Oh, no," said the painter in defense of his window. "Because it's hermetically

sealed it keeps the warmth in much better than a double window, though it's only a simple

pane of glass. And if I want to air the place, which isn't really necessary, for the air comes

in everywhere through the chinks, I can always open one of the doors or even both of

them." Somewhat reassured by this explanation, K. glanced round to discover the second

door. The painter saw what he was doing and said: "It's behind you, I had to block it up by

putting the bed in front of it." Only now did K. see the little door in the wall. "This is really

too small for a studio," said the painter, as if to forestall K.'s criticisms. "I had to manage



as best I could. Of course it's a bad place for a bed, just in front of that door.  
The Judge

whom I'm painting just now, for instance, always comes in by that door, and  
I've had to

give him a key for it so that he can wait for me in the studio if I happen to  
be out. Well, he

usually arrives early in the morning, while I'm still asleep. And of course  
however fast

asleep I am, it wakes me with a start when the door behind my bed  
suddenly opens. You

would lose any respect you have for the Judges if you could hear the curses  
that welcome

him when he climbs over my bed in the early morning. I could certainly  
take the key away

from him again, but that would only make things worse. It is easy enough to  
burst open

any of the doors here." All during these exchanges K. kept considering  
whether he should

take off his jacket, but at last he realized that if he did not he would be  
incapable of staying

any longer in the room, so he took it off, laying it, however, across his knee,  
to save time

in putting it on again whenever the interview was finished. Scarcely had he  
taken off his

jacket when one of the girls cried: "He's taken off his jacket now," and he  
could hear them

all crowding to peer through the cracks and view the spectacle for themselves. "The girls

think," said the painter, "that I'm going to paint your portrait and that's why you are taking

off your jacket." "I see," said K., very little amused, for he did not feel much better than

before, although he was now sitting in his shirt-sleeves. Almost morosely he asked: "What

did you say the other two possibilities were?" He had already forgotten what they were

called. "Ostensible acquittal and indefinite postponement," said the painter. "It lies with

you to choose between them. I can help you to either of them, though not without taking

some trouble, and, as far as that is concerned, the difference between them is that

ostensible acquittal demands temporary concentration, while postponement taxes your

strength less but means a steady strain. First, then, let us take ostensible acquittal. If you

decide on that, I shall write down on a sheet of paper an affidavit of your innocence. The text for such an affidavit has been handed down to me by my father and is unassailable.

Then with this affidavit I shall make a round of the Judges I know, beginning, let us say,

with the Judge I am painting now, when he comes for his sitting tonight. I shall lay the

affidavit before him, explain to him that you are innocent, and guarantee your innocence

myself. And that is not merely a formal guarantee but a real and binding one." In the eyes

of the painter there was a faint suggestion of reproach that K. should lay upon him the

burden of such a responsibility. "That would be very kind of you," said K. "And the Judge

would believe you and yet not give me a definite acquittal?" "As I have already explained,"

replied the painter. "Besides, it is not in the least certain that every Judge will believe me;

some Judges, for instance, will ask to see you in person. And then I should have to take

you with me to call on them. Though when that happens the battle is already half won,

particularly as I should tell you beforehand, of course, exactly what line to take with each

Judge. The real difficulty comes with the Judges who turn me away at the start -- and that's

sure to happen too. I shall go on petitioning them, of course, but we shall have to do

without them, though one can afford to do that, since dissent by individual Judges cannot

affect the result. Well then, if I get a sufficient number of Judges to subscribe to the

affidavit, I shall then deliver it to the Judge who is actually conducting your trial. Possibly

I may have secured his signature too, then everything will be settled fairly soon, a little

sooner than usual. Generally speaking, there should be no difficulties worth mentioning

after that, the accused at this stage feels supremely confident. Indeed it's remarkable, but

true, that people's confidence mounts higher at this stage than after their acquittal. There's

no need for them to do much more. The Judge is covered by the guarantees of the other

Judges subscribing to the affidavit, and so he can grant an acquittal with an easy mind, and

though some formalities will remain to be settled, he will undoubtedly grant the acquittal

to please me and his other friends. Then you can walk out of the Court a free man." "So

then I'm free," said K. doubtfully. "Yes," said the painter, "but only ostensibly free, or

more exactly, provisionally free. For the Judges of the lowest grade, to whom my

acquaintances belong, haven't the power to grant a final acquittal, that power is reserved

for the highest Court of all, which is quite inaccessible to you, to me, and to all of us. What

the prospects are up there we do not know and, I may say in passing, do not even want to

know. The great privilege, then, of absolving from guilt our Judges do not possess, but

they do have the right to take the burden of the charge off your shoulders. That is to say,

when you are acquitted in this fashion the charge is lifted from your shoulders for the time

being, but it continues to hover above you and can, as soon as an order comes from on

high, be laid upon you again. As my connection with the Court is such a close one, I can

also tell you how in the regulations of the Law Court offices the distinction between

definite and ostensible acquittal is made manifest. In definite acquittal the documents

relating to the case are said to be completely annulled, they simply vanish from sight, not

only the charge but also the records of the case and even the acquittal are destroyed,

everything is destroyed. That's not the case with ostensible acquittal. The documents

remain as they were, except that the affidavit is added to them and a record of the acquittal

and the grounds for granting it. The whole dossier continues to circulate, as the regular

official routine demands, passing on to the higher Courts, being referred to the lower ones again, and thus swinging backwards and forwards with greater or smaller oscillations,

longer or shorter delays. These peregrinations are incalculable. A detached observer might

sometimes fancy that the whole case had been forgotten, the documents lost, and the

acquittal made absolute. No one really acquainted with the Court could think such a thing.

No document is ever lost, the Court never forgets anything. One day -- quite unexpectedly -

- some Judge will take up the documents and look at them attentively, recognize that in

this case the charge is still valid, and order an immediate arrest. I have been speaking on

the assumption that a long time elapses between the ostensible acquittal and the new arrest;

that is possible and I have known of such cases, but it is just as possible for the acquitted

man to go straight home from the Court and find officers already waiting to arrest him

again. Then, of course, all his freedom is at an end." "And the case begins all over again?"

asked K. almost incredulously. "Certainly," said the painter. "The case begins all over

again, but again it is possible, just as before, to secure an ostensible acquittal. One must

again apply all one's energies to the case and never give in." These last words were

probably uttered because he noticed that K. was looking somewhat collapsed. "But," said

K., as if he wanted to forestall any more revelations, "isn't the engineering of a second

acquittal more difficult than the first?" "On that point," said the painter, "one can say

nothing with certainty. You mean, I take it, that the second arrest might influence the

Judges against the accused? That is not so. Even while they are pronouncing the first

acquittal the Judges foresee the possibility of the new arrest. Such a consideration,

therefore, hardly comes into question. But it may happen, for hundreds of reasons, that the

Judges are in a different frame of mind about the case, even from a legal viewpoint, and

one's efforts to obtain a second acquittal must consequently be adapted to the changed

circumstances, and in general must be every whit as energetic as those that secured the first

one." "But this second acquittal isn't final either," said K., turning away his head in

repudiation. "Of course not," said the painter. "The second acquittal is followed by the

third arrest, the third acquittal by the fourth arrest, and so on. That is implied in the very

conception of ostensible acquittal." K. said nothing. "Ostensible acquittal doesn't seem to

appeal to you," said the painter. "Perhaps postponement would suit you better. Shall I

explain to you how postponement works?" K. nodded. The painter was lolling back in his

chair, his nightshirt gaped open, he had thrust one hand inside it and was lightly fingering

his breast. "Postponement," he said, gazing in front of him for a moment as if seeking a

completely accurate explanation, "postponement consists in preventing the case from ever

getting any further than its first stages. To achieve that it is necessary for the accused and

his agent, but more particularly his agent, to remain continuously in personal touch with

the Court. Let me point out again that this does not demand such intense concentration of

one's energies as an ostensible acquittal, yet on the other hand it does require far greater

vigilance. You daren't let the case out of your sight, you visit the Judge at regular intervals

as well as in emergencies and must do all that is in your power to keep him friendly; if you



don't know the Judge personally, then you must try to influence him through other Judges

whom you do know, but without giving up your efforts to secure a personal interview. If

you neglect none of these things, then you can assume with fair certainty that the case will

never pass beyond its first stages. Not that the proceedings are quashed, but the accused is almost as likely to escape sentence as if he were free. As against ostensible acquittal

postponement has this advantage, that the future of the accused is less uncertain, he is

secured from the terrors of sudden arrest and doesn't need to fear having to undergo --

perhaps at a most inconvenient moment -- the strain and agitation which are inevitable in

the achievement of ostensible acquittal. Though postponement, too, has certain drawbacks

for the accused, and these must not be minimized. In saying this I am not thinking of the

fact that the accused is never free; he isn't free either, in any real sense, after the ostensible

acquittal. There are other drawbacks. The case can't be held up indefinitely without at least

some plausible grounds being provided. So as a matter of form a certain activity must be

shown from time to time, various measures have to be taken, the accused is questioned,

evidence is collected, and so on. For the case must be kept going all the time, although

only in the small circle to which it has been artificially restricted. This naturally involves

the accused in occasional unpleasantness, but you must not think of it as being too

unpleasant. For it's all a formality, the interrogations, for instance, are only short ones; if

you have neither the time nor the inclination to go, you can excuse yourself; with some

Judges you can even plan your interviews a long time ahead, all that it amounts to is a

formal recognition of your status as an accused man by regular appearances before your

Judge." Already while these last words were being spoken K. had taken his jacket across

his arm and got up. "He's getting up now," came the cry at once from behind the door.

"Are you going already?" asked the painter, who had also got up. "I'm sure it's the air here

that is driving you away. I'm sorry about it. I had a great deal more to tell you. I have had

to express myself very briefly. But I hope my statements were lucid enough." "Oh, yes,"

said K., whose head was aching with the strain of forcing himself to listen. In spite of K.'s

confirmation, the painter went on to sum up the matter again, as if to give him a last word

of comfort: "Both methods have this in common, that they prevent the accused from

coming up for sentence." "But they also prevent an actual acquittal," said K. in a low

voice, as if embarrassed by his own perspicacity. "You have grasped the kernel of the

matter," said the painter quickly. K. laid his hand on his overcoat, but could not even

summon the resolution to put on his jacket. He would have liked best of all to bundle them

both together and rush out with them into the fresh air. Even the thought of the girls could

not move him to put on his garments, although their voices were already piping the

premature news that he was doing so. The painter was anxious to guess K.'s intentions, so

he said: "I take it that you haven't come to any decision yet on my suggestions. That's right.

In fact, I should have advised you against it had you attempted an immediate decision. It's

like splitting hairs to distinguish the advantages and disadvantages. You must weigh

everything very carefully. On the other hand you mustn't lose too much time either." "I'll

come back again soon," said K., in a sudden fit of resolution putting on his jacket, flinging

his overcoat across his shoulders, and hastening to the door, behind which the girls at once

began shrieking. K. felt he could almost see them through the door. "But you must keep

your word," said the painter, who had not followed him, "or else I'll have to come to the

Bank myself to make inquiries." "Unlock this door, will you?" said K., tugging at the

handle, which the girls, as he could tell from the resistance, were hanging on to from

outside. "You don't want to be bothered by the girls, do you?" asked the painter. "You had better take this way out," and he indicated the door behind the bed. K. was perfectly

willing and rushed back to the bed. But instead of opening the bedside door the painter

crawled right under the bed and said from down there: "Wait just a minute. Wouldn't you

like to see a picture or two that you might care to buy?" K. did not want to be discourteous,

the painter had really taken an interest in him and promised to help him further, also it was

entirely owing to K.'s distractedness that the matter of a fee for the painter's services had

not been mentioned, consequently he could not turn aside his offer now, and so he

consented to look at the pictures, though he was trembling with impatience to be out of the

place. Titorelli dragged a pile of unframed canvases from under the bed; they were so

thickly covered with dust that when he blew some of it from the topmost, K. was almost

blinded and choked by the cloud that flew up. "Wild Nature, a heathscape," said the

painter, handing K. the picture. It showed two stunted trees standing far apart from each

other in darkish grass. In the background was a many-hued sunset. "Fine," said K., "I'll buy

it." K.'s curtness had been unthinking and so he was glad when the painter, instead of being

offended, lifted another canvas from the floor. "Here's the companion picture," he said. It

might be intended as a companion picture, but there was not the slightest difference that

one could see between it and the other, here were the two trees, here the grass, and there

the sunset. But K. did not bother about that. "They're fine prospects," he said. "I'll buy both

of them and hang them up in my office." "You seem to like the subject," said the painter,

fishing out a third canvas. "By a lucky chance I have another of these studies here." But it

was not merely a similar study, it was simply the same wild heathscape again. The painter

was apparently exploiting to the full this opportunity to sell off his old pictures. "I'll take

that one as well," said K. "How much for the three pictures?" "We'll settle that next time,"

said the painter. "You're in a hurry today and we're going to keep in touch with each other

anyhow. I may say I'm very glad you like these pictures and I'll throw in all the others

under the bed as well. They're heathscapes every one of them, I've painted dozens of them

in my time. Some people won't have anything to do with these subjects because they're too

somber, but there are always people like yourself who prefer somber pictures." But by now

K. had no mind to listen to the professional pronouncements of the peddling painter.

"Wrap the pictures up," he cried, interrupting Titorelli's garrulity, "my attendant will call

tomorrow and fetch them." "That isn't necessary," said the painter. "I think I can manage to

get you a porter to take them along with you now." And at last he reached over the bed and

unlocked the door. "Don't be afraid to step on the bed," he said. "Everybody who comes

here does that." K. would not have hesitated to do it even without his invitation, he had

actually set one foot plump on the middle of the feather bed, but when he looked out

through the open door he drew his foot back again. "What's this?" he asked the painter.

"What are you surprised at?" returned the painter, surprised in his turn. "These are the Law

Court offices. Didn't you know that there were Law Court offices here? There are Law

Court offices in almost every attic, why should this be an exception? My studio really

belongs to the Law Court offices, but the Court has put it at my disposal." It was not so

much the discovery of the Law Court offices that startled K.; he was much more startled at

himself, at his complete ignorance of all things concerning the Court. He accepted it as a

fundamental principle for an accused man to be always forearmed, never to let himself be caught napping, never to let his eyes stray unthinkingly to the right when his judge was

looming up on the left -- and against that very principle he kept offending again and again.

Before him stretched a long passage, from which was wafted an air compared to which the

air in the studio was refreshing. Benches stood on either side of the passage, just as in the

lobby of the offices that were handling K.'s case. There seemed, then, to be exact

regulations for the interior disposition of these offices. At the moment there was no great

coming and going of clients. A man was half sitting, half reclining on a bench, his face was

buried in his arms and he seemed to be asleep; another man was standing in the dusk at the

end of the passage. K. now stepped over the bed, the painter following him with the

pictures. They soon found an usher -- by this time K. recognized these men from the gold

button added to the buttons on their ordinary civilian clothing-- and the painter gave him

instructions to accompany K. with the pictures. K. tottered rather than walked, keeping his

handkerchief pressed to his mouth. They had almost reached the exit when the girls came

rushing to meet them, so K. had not been spared even that encounter. The girls had

obviously seen the second door of the studio opening and had made a detour at full speed,

in order to get in. "I can't escort you any farther," cried the painter laughingly, as the girls

surrounded him. "Till our next meeting. And don't take too long to think it over K. did



not even look back. When he reached the street he hailed the first cab that came along. He

must get rid of the usher, whose gold button offended his eyes, even though, likely enough,

they escaped everyone else's attention. The usher, zealously dutiful, got up beside the

coachman on the box, but K. made him get down again. Midday was long past when K.

reached the Bank. He would have liked to leave the pictures in the cab, but was afraid that

some day he might be required to recall himself to the painter by their means. So he had

them carried into his office and locked them in the bottom drawer of his desk, to save them

for the next few days at least from the eyes of the Assistant Manager.  
Chapter 8

Block, the Tradesman / Dismissal of the Lawyer

AT LONG last K. had made up his mind to take his case out of the lawyer's hands. He

could not quite rid himself of doubts about the wisdom of this step, but his conviction of its

necessity prevailed. To screw himself up to the decision cost him a lot of energy, on the

day when he resolved to visit the lawyer his work lagged behind, he had to stay very late in

the office, and so he did not reach the lawyer's door until well past ten o'clock. Before

actually ringing the bell he thought it over once again; it might be better to dismiss the

lawyer by telephone or by letter, a personal interview was bound to prove painful. Still, he

did not want to lose the advantage of a personal interview, any other mode of dismissal

would be accepted in silence or with a few formal words of acknowledgment, and unless

he were to extract information from Leni he would never learn how the lawyer had reacted

to the dismissal and what consequences for himself were likely to ensue according to the

lawyer's opinion, which was not entirely negligible. Face to face with the lawyer, one

could spring the dismissal on him as a surprise, and however guarded the man might be, K.

would be easily able to learn from his demeanor all that he wanted to know. It was even

possible that he might perceive the wisdom of leaving the case in the lawyer's hands after

all and might withdraw his ultimatum.

The first ring at the lawyer's door produced, as usual, no result. "Leni could be a little

quicker," thought K. But it was enough to be thankful for that no third party had come

nosing in, as usually happened, the man in the dressing-gown, for instance, or some other

interfering creature. K. glanced at the farther door as he pressed the button a second time,

but on this occasion both doors remained firmly shut. At last a pair of eyes appeared at the

peephole in the lawyer's door, but they were not Leni's eyes. Someone shot back the bolt,

but still blocked the way as a preliminary measure, calling back into the house: "It's him,"

and only then flinging the door open. K. had been pushing against the door, for he could

already hear a key being hastily turned in the neighboring lock, and when it suddenly

opened he was literally precipitated into the hail and caught a glimpse of Leni, for whom

the warning cry must have been intended, rushing down the lobby in her shift. He peered

after her for a moment and then turned to see who had opened the door. It was a dried-up

little man with a long beard, he was holding a candle in one hand. "Are you employed

here?" asked K. "No," said the man, "I don't belong to the house, I'm only the lawyer's

client, i've come here on business." "In your shirt-sleeves?" asked K., indicating the man's

inadequate attire. "Oh, excuse me," said the man, peering at himself by the light of the

candle as if he had been unaware of his condition. "Is Leni your mistress?" inquired K.

curtly. lie was straddling his legs slightly, his hands, in which he was holding his hat,

clasped behind his back. The mere possession of a thick greatcoat gave him a feeling of

superiority over the meager little fellow. "Oh, God," said the other, raising one hand before his face in horrified repudiation, "no, no, what are you thinking of?" "You look an honest

man," said K., smiling, "but all the same -- come along." He waved him on with his hat,

urging him to go first. "What's your name?" K. asked as they were proceeding. "Block, a

tradesman," said the little man, turning round to introduce himself, but K. would not suffer

him to remain standing. "Is that your real name?" went on K. "Of course," came the

answer, "why should you doubt it?" "I thought you might have some reason for concealing

your name," said K. He was feeling at ease now, at ease as one is when speaking to an

inferior in some foreign country, keeping one's own affairs to oneself and discussing with

equanimity the other man's interests, which gain consequence for the attention one bestows

on them yet can be dismissed at will. As they came to the lawyer's study K. halted, opened

the door, and called to the fellow, who was meekly advancing along the lobby: "Not so

fast, show a light here." K. fancied that Leni might have hidden herself in the study; he

made the tradesman shine the candle into all the corners, but the room was empty. In front

of the Judge's portrait K. caught the fellow from behind by the braces and pulled him back.

"Do you know who that is?" he asked, pointing upward at the picture. The man raised the

candle, blinked up at the picture, and said : "It's a Judge." "A high Judge?" asked K.,

stationing himself beside the other to observe what impression the portrait made on him.

The man gazed up with reverence. "It is a high Judge," he said. "You haven't much

insight," said K., "that's the lowest of the low among the examining Judges." "Now, I

remember," said the man, letting the candle sink. "I've been told that before." "But of

course," cried K., "how could I forget, of course you must have heard it before." "But why,

why must I?" asked the man, moving toward the door, for K. was propelling him from

behind. When they were out in the lobby, K. said : "I suppose you know where Leni's

hiding?" "Hiding?" said he. "No, she should be in the kitchen making soup for the lawyer."

"Why didn't you tell me that at first?" asked K. "I was going to take you there, but you

called me back," answered the man, as if bewildered by these contradictory demands.

"You fancy you're being very sly," said K., "lead the way then!" K. had never yet been in

the kitchen, and it was surprisingly large and well furnished. The cooking-stove alone was

three times the size of an ordinary stove; the rest of the fittings could not be seen in detail

since the sole light came from a small lamp hanging near the door. Leni was standing by

the stove in a white apron, as usual, emptying eggs into a pan that stood over an alcohol

flame. "Good evening, Joseph," she said, glancing over her shoulder. "Good evening," said

K., waving the tradesman to a chair some distance away, on which the man obediently sat

down. Then K. went quite close up behind Leni, leaned over her shoulder, and asked:

"Who's this man F" Leni put her disengaged arm round K., stirring the soup with the other,

and pulled him forward. "He's a miserable creature," she said, "a poor tradesman called

Block. Just look at him." They both glanced round. The tradesman was sitting in the chair

K. had indicated for him; having blown out the candle, which was no longer needed, he

was snuffing the wick with his fingers. "You were in your shift," said K., turning Leni's

head forcibly to the stove. She made no answer. "Is he your lover?" asked K. She reached

for the soup pan, but K.. imprisoned both her hands and said: "Give me an answer!" She

said: "Come into the study and I'll explain everything." "No," said K., "I want you to tell

me here." She slipped her arm into his and tried to give him a kiss, but K. fended her off, saying: "I don't want you to kiss me now." "Joseph," said Leni, gazing at him imploringly

and yet frankly, "surely you're not jealous of Herr Block?" Then she turned to the

tradesman and said: "Rudi, come to the rescue, you can see that I'm under suspicion, put

that candle down." One might have thought that he had been paying no attention, but he

knew at once what she meant. "I can't think what you have to be jealous about either," he

said, with no great acumen. "Nor can I, really," replied K., regarding him with a smile.

Leni laughed outright and profited by K.'s momentary distraction to hook herself on to his

arm, whispering: "Leave him alone now, you can see the kind of creature he is. I've shown

him a little kindness because he's one of the lawyer's best clients, but that was the only

reason. What about yourself? Do you want to see the lawyer tonight? He's far from well

today; all the same, if you like I'll tell him you're here. But you're certainly going to spend

the night with me. It's such a long time since you were here last, even the lawyer has been

asking after you. It won't do to neglect your case! And I've got some information for you,

too, things I've found out. But the first thing is to get your coat off." She helped him out of

his coat, took his hat from him, ran into the hall to hang them up, and then ran back to keep

an eye on the soup. "Shall I announce you first or give him his soup first?" "Announce me

first," said K. He felt irritated, for he had originally intended to discuss the whole case

thoroughly with Leni, especially the question of dismissing the lawyer, and the tradesman's



being there spoiled the situation. But again it struck him that his affairs were too important

to allow of decisive interference by a petty tradesman, and so he called back Leni, who

was already out in the lobby. "No, let him have his soup first," he said, "it'll strengthen him

for his interview with me, and he'll need it." "So you're one of the lawyer's clients too,"

said the tradesman quietly from his corner, as if confirming a statement. His comment was

but ill received. "What's that got to do with you?" said K., and Leni put in: "You be quiet."

To K. Leni said: "Well, then, I'll take him his soup first," and she poured the soup into a

bowl. "Only there's a risk that he might go to sleep immediately, he always falls asleep

after food." "What I have to say to him will keep him awake all right," said K., who

wanted to let it be known that his interview with the lawyer promised to be momentous; he

wanted Leni to question him about it and only then would he ask her advice. But Leni

merely followed out to the letter the orders he gave her. As she passed him with the bowl

of soup she deliberately nudged him and whispered: "I'll announce you the minute he's

finished his soup, so that I can have you back as soon as possible." "Get along," said K.,

"get along with you." "Don't be so cross," she said, turning right round in the doorway,

soup bowl and all.

K. stood gazing after her; now it was definitely settled that he would dismiss the

lawyer, and it was just as well that he should have no chance of discussing it beforehand

with Leni; the whole affair was rather beyond her scope and she would certainly have tried

to dissuade him, possibly she might even have prevailed on him to put it off this time, and

he would have continued to be a prey to doubts and fears until in the long run he carried

out his resolve, since it was too imperative a resolve to be dropped. But the sooner it was

carried out the less he would suffer. Perhaps, after all, the tradesman might be able to

throw some light on the subject. K. turned toward the man, who immediately gave a start as if to jump to his feet.

"Keep your seat," said K., drawing a chair up beside him. "You're an old client of the

lawyer's, aren't you?" "Yes," said the tradesman, "a very old client." "How long has he

been in charge of your affairs?" asked K. "I don't quite know what affairs you mean," said

the tradesman; "in my business affairs -- I'm a grain dealer -- the lawyer has been my

representative since the very beginning, that must be for the past twenty years, and in my

private case, which is probably what you are thinking of, he has been my lawyer also from

the beginning, which is more than five years ago. Yes, well over five years now," he

confirmed, drawing out an old pocketbook. "I have it all written down here. I can give you

the exact dates if you like. It's difficult to keep them in one's head. My case probably goes

back further than I said, it began just after my wife's death, certainly more than five and a

half years ago." K. moved his chair closer to the man. "So the lawyer has an ordinary

practice as well?" he asked. This alliance between Court and jurisprudence seemed to him

uncommonly reassuring. "Of course," said the tradesman, adding in a whisper: "They even

say that he's better at ordinary law than at the other kind." Then apparently he regretted

having ventured so far, for he laid a hand on K.'s shoulder and said: "Don't give me away, I

implore you." K. patted him soothingly on the thigh and said: "No, I'm not an informer."

"He's vindictive, you see," said Block. "Surely he wouldn't harm a faithful client like you?"

said K. "Oh, yes," said Block, "once he's roused he draws no distinctions; besides, I'm not

really faithful to him." "How is that?" asked K. "Perhaps I oughtn't to tell you," said Block

doubtfully. "I think you can risk it," said K. "Well," said Block, "I'll tell you a certain

amount, but in your turn you must tell me one of your secrets, so that we each have a hold

over the other." "You're very cautious," said K., "but I'll entrust you with a secret that will

allay all your suspicions. In what way, then, are you unfaithful to the lawyer?" "Well," said

the tradesman hesitatingly, as if confessing something dishonorable, "I have other lawyers

as well as him." "That's nothing very dreadful," said K., somewhat disappointed. "It's

supposed to be," said the tradesman, who had not breathed freely since making his

confession, but now gained a little confidence from K.'s rejoinder. "It's not allowed. And

least of all is it allowed to consult pettifogging lawyers when one is the client of an official

lawyer. And that's exactly what I've been doing, I have five pettifogging lawyers besides

him." "Five !" cried K., amazed at the mere number, "five lawyers besides this one?" Block

nodded: "I'm even negotiating with a sixth one." "But what do you need so many for?"

asked K. "I need every one of them," said Block. "Tell me why, will you?" asked K. "With

pleasure," said the tradesman. "To begin with, I don't want to lose my case, as you can well

understand. And so I daren't ignore anything that might help me; if there's even the faintest

hope of an advantage for myself I daren't reject it. That's why I've spent every penny I

possess on this case of mine. For instance, I've drawn all the money out of my business;

my business offices once filled nearly a whole floor of the building where now I need only

a small back room and an apprentice. Of course it's not only the withdrawal of my money

that has brought the business down, but the withdrawal of my energies. When you're trying

to do anything you can to help your case along you haven't much energy to spare for other

things." "So you've been working on your own behalf as well," interrupted K., "that's precisely what I wanted to ask you about." "There's not much to tell you," said the

tradesman. "I did try my hand at it in the beginning, but I soon had to give it up. It's too

exhausting, and the results are disappointing. Merely attending the Court to keep an eye on

things proved too much, for me, at least. It makes you feel limp even to sit about and wait

your turn. But you know yourself what the air's like." "How do you know I was ever up

there?" asked K. "I happened to be in the lobby when you were passing through." "What a

coincidence 1" cried K., quite carried away and completely forgetting the ridiculous figure

the tradesman had cut in his estimation. "So you saw me! You were in the lobby when 31

passed through. Yes, I did pass through the lobby once." "It's not such a coincidence as all

that," said the tradesman, "I'm up there nearly every day." "I'm likely to be up there, too,

often enough after this," said K., "only I can hardly expect to be received with such honor

as on that occasion. Everyone stood up. I suppose they took me for a Judge." "No," said

the tradesman, "it was the usher we stood up for. We knew you were an accused man.

News of that kind spreads rapidly." "So you knew that already," commented K., "then

perhaps you thought me somewhat high and mighty. Did no one comment on it?" "Not

unfavorably," said the tradesman. "But it's all nonsense." "What's nonsense?" asked K.

"Why do you insist on asking?" said the tradesman, irritably. "Apparently you don't know

the people there yet and you might take it up wrongly. You must remember that in these

proceedings things are always coming up for discussion that are simply beyond reason,

people are too tired and distracted to think and so they take refuge in superstition. I'm as

bad as anyone myself. And one of the superstitions is that you're supposed to tell from a

man's face, especially the line of his lips, how his case is going to turn out. Well, people

declared that judging from the expression of your lips you would be found guilty, and in

the near future too. I tell you, it's a silly superstition and in most cases completely belied

by the facts, but if you live among these people it's difficult to escape the prevailing

opinion. You can't imagine what a strong effect such superstitions have. You spoke to a

man up there, didn't you? And he could hardly utter a word in answer. Of course there's

many a reason for being bewildered up there, but one of the reasons why he couldn't bring

out an answer was the shock he got from looking at your lips. He said afterwards that he

saw on your lips the sign of his own condemnation." "On my lips?" asked K., taking out a

pocket mirror and studying them. "I can't see anything peculiar about my lips. Do you?" "I

don't either," said the tradesman, "not in the least." "How superstitious these people are!"

cried K. "Didn't I tell you so ?" asked the other. "Do they meet each other so frequently,

then, and exchange all these ideas?" queried K., "I've never had anything to do with them

myself." "As a rule they don't mix much," said the tradesman, "it would be hardly possible,

there are too many of them. Besides, they have few interests in common. Occasionally a

group believes it has found a common interest, but it soon finds out its mistake. Combined

action against the Court is impossible. Each, case is judged on its own merits, the Court is

very conscientious about that, and so common action is out of the question. An individual

here and there may score a point in secret, but no one hears it until afterwards, no one



knows how it has been done. So there's no real community, people come across each other

in the lobbies, but there's not much conversation. The superstitious beliefs are an old

tradition and increase automatically." "I saw all the people in the lobby," remarked K., "and thought how pointless it was for them to be hanging about." "It's not pointless at all,"

said Block, "the only pointless thing is to try taking independent action. As I told you, I

have five lawyers besides this one. You might think -- as I did once -- that I could safely

wash my hands of the case. But you would be wrong. I have to watch it more carefully

than if I had only one lawyer. I suppose you don't understand that?" "No," said K., laying

his hand appealingly on the other's to keep him from talking so fast, "I would only like to

beg you to speak more slowly, all these things are extremely important to me and I can't

follow so quickly." "I'm glad you reminded me," said the tradesman; "of course you're a

newcomer, you're young in the matter. Your case is six months old, isn't it? Yes, I've heard

about it. An infant of a case! But I've had to think these things out I don't know how many

times, they've become a second nature to me." "I suppose you're thankful to think that your

case is so far advanced," asked K., not liking to make a direct inquiry how the tradesman's

case stood. But he received no direct answer either. "Yes, I've carried my burden for five

long years," said Block, drooping his head, "it's no small achievement, that." Then he sat

silent for a little. K. listened to hear if Leni were coming back. On the one hand he did not

want her to come in just then, for he had many questions still to ask, nor did he want her to

find him so deep in intimate conversation with the tradesman, but on the other hand he was

annoyed because she was spending so much time with the lawyer while he was in the

house, much more time than was needed for handing over a bowl of soup. "I can still

remember exactly," the tradesman began again, and K. was at once all attention, "the days

when my case was at much the same stage as yours is now. I had only this lawyer then,

and I wasn't particularly satisfied with him." "Now I'm going to find out everything,"

thought K., nodding his head eagerly, as if that would encourage the tradesman to bring

out all the right information. "My case," Block continued, "wasn't making any progress;

there were of course interrogations, and I attended every one of them, I collected evidence,

I even laid all my account books before the Court, which wasn't necessary at all, as I

discovered later. I kept running to the lawyer, he presented various petitions --" "Various

petitions?" asked K. "Yes, certainly," said Block. "That's an important point for me," said

K., "for in my case he's still working on the first petition. He's done nothing at all yet. Now

I see how scandalously he's neglecting me." "There might be several excellent reasons why

the petition isn't ready yet," said Block. "Let me tell you that my petitions turned out later

to be quite worthless. I even had a look at one of them, thanks to the kindness of a Court

official. It was very learned but it said nothing of any consequence. Crammed with Latin in

the first place, which I don't understand, and then whole pages of general appeals to the

Court, then flattering references to particular officials, who weren't actually named but

were easy enough for anyone versed in these matters to recognize, then self-praise of the

lawyer himself, in the course of which he addressed the Court with a crawling humility,

ending up with an analysis of various cases from ancient times that were supposed to

resemble mine. I must say that this analysis, in so far as I could follow it, was very careful

and thorough. You mustn't think that I'm passing judgment on the lawyer's work; that

petition, after all, was only one of many; but at any rate, and this is what I'm coming to, I

couldn't see that my case was making any progress." "What kind of progress did you

expect to see?" asked K. "A good question," said the tradesman with a smile, "it's very rarely that progress in these cases is visible at all. But I didn't know that then. I'm a

businessman, and I was much more of a businessman then than now, I wanted to see

palpable results, the whole negotiation should be coming to a finish, I thought, or taking a

regular upward course. Instead of that there were only ceremonial interviews, one after

another, mostly of the same tenor, where I could reel off the responses like a litany; several

times a week Court messengers came to my place of business or to my house or wherever I

was to be found, and that, of course, was a nuisance (today I'm much better off in that

respect, for telephone calls bother me less) ; and besides all that, rumors about my case

began to spread among my business friends, but especially among my relatives, so that I

was being injured on all sides without the slightest sign of any intention on the part of the

Court to begin legal proceedings in the near future. So I went to the lawyer and made my

complaint. He treated me to a lengthy explanation, but refused utterly to take action in my

sense of the word, saying that nobody could influence the Court to appoint a day for

hearing a case, and that to urge anything of the kind in a petition -- as I wanted him to do --

was simply unheard of and would only ruin myself and him. I thought: what this lawyer

won't or can't do, another will and can. So I looked round for other lawyers. I may as well

tell you now that not one of them ever prayed the Court to fix a day for the trial of my

case, or managed to obtain such a trial; it is really an impossibility -- with one qualification

that I shall explain later -- and the lawyer had not misled me there, although I found no

cause for regretting having called in the other lawyers. I suppose Dr. Huld has told you

plenty of things about the pettifogging lawyers, he has probably described them as

contemptible creatures, and so they are, in a sense. All the same, in speaking of them and

contrasting himself and his colleagues with them he always makes a small mistake, which

I may as well call your attention to in passing. He always refers to the lawyers of his own

circle as the 'great lawyers,' by way of contrast. Now that's untrue; any man can call

himself 'great,' of course, if he pleases, but in this matter the Court tradition must decide.

And according to the Court tradition, which recognizes both small and great lawyers

outside the hole-and-corner lawyers, our lawyer and his colleagues rank only among the

small lawyers, while the really great lawyers, whom I have merely heard of and never

seen, stand as high above the small lawyers as these above the despised pettifogging

lawyers." "The really great lawyers?" asked K. "Who are they, then? How does one get at

them?" "So you've never heard of them," said Block. "There's hardly an accused man who

doesn't spend some time dreaming of them after hearing about them. Don't you give way to

that temptation. I have no idea who the great lawyers are and I don't believe they can be

got at. I know of no single instance in which it could be definitely asserted that they had

intervened. They do defend certain cases, but one cannot achieve that oneself. They only

defend those whom they wish to defend, and they never take action, I should think, until

the case is already beyond the province of the lower Court. In fact, it's better to put them

out of one's mind altogether, or else one finds interviews with ordinary lawyers so stale

and stupid, with their niggling counsels and proposals -- I have experienced it myself --

that one feels like throwing the whole thing up and taking to bed with one's face to the

wall. And of course that would be stupider still, for even in bed one wouldn't find peace."

"So you didn't entertain the thought of going to the great lawyers?" asked K. "Not for long," said Block, smiling again; "unfortunately one can never quite forget about them,

especially during the night. But at that time I was looking for immediate results, and so I

went to the pettifogging lawyers."

"How close you've got!" cried Leni, who had come back with the soup bowl and was

standing in the door- way. They were indeed sitting so close to each other that they must

have bumped their heads together at the slightest movement; Block, who was not only a

small man but stooped forward as he sat, spoke so low that K. was forced to bend down to

hear every word he said. "Give us a moment or two," cried K., warning Leni off; the hand

which he still kept on the tradesman's hand twitched with irritation. "He wanted me to tell

him about my case," the tradesman said to Leni. "Well, go on telling him," said she. Her

tone in speaking to Block was kindly but a little condescending. That annoyed K.; the man,

after all, as he had discovered, possessed a certain value, he had experiences and knew

how to communicate them. Leni at least probably misjudged him. To K.'s further

annoyance Leni removed the candle, which he had been grasping all this time, wiped his

hand with her apron, and knelt down to scratch off some tallow which had dripped on his

trousers. "You were going to tell me about pettifogging lawyers," said K., pushing Leni's

hand away without comment. "What do you think you're doing?" she asked, giving K. a

small slap and resuming her task. "Yes, the pettifogging lawyers," said Block, passing his



hand over his brow as if in reflection. K. wanted to help him out and added:  
"You were

looking for immediate results and so you went to the pettifogging lawyers."  
"That's right,"

said Block, but he did not continue. "Perhaps he doesn't want to talk of it  
before Leni,"

thought K., suppressing his impatience to hear the rest of the story at once  
and not urging

the man any more.

"Did you announce me?" he asked Leni instead. "Of course," she said, "and  
the

lawyer's waiting for you. Leave Block alone now, you can talk to him later,  
for he's staying

here." K. still hesitated. "Are you staying here?" he asked the tradesman; he  
wanted the

man to speak for himself, he disliked the way Leni discussed him as if he  
were absent, he

was filled with obscure irritation today against Leni. And again it was Leni  
who did the

speaking: "He often sleeps here." "Sleeps here?" cried K.; he had thought  
that the

tradesman was waiting only till the interview with the lawyer was brought  
to a speedy

conclusion, and that then they would go off together to discuss the whole  
business

thoroughly in private. "Yes," said Leni, "everyone isn't like you, Joseph, getting an

interview with the lawyer at any hour they choose. It doesn't even seem to strike you as

surprising that a sick man like the lawyer should agree to see you at eleven o'clock at night.

You take all that your friends do for you far too much as a matter of course. Well, your

friends, or I at least, like doing things for you. I don't ask for thanks and I don't need any

thanks, except that I want you to be fond of me." "Fond of you?" thought K., and oily after

framing the words did it occur to him: "But I am fond of her." Yet he said, ignoring the

rest of her remarks: "He receives me because I'm his client. If I needed the help of others

even to get an interview with my lawyer, I'd have to be bowing and scraping at every turn."

"How difficult he is today, isn't he?" said Leni to the tradesman. "Now it's my turn to be treated as if I were absent," thought K., and his irritation extended to the tradesman too

when the latter, copying Leni's discourtesy, remarked: "But the lawyer has other reasons

for agreeing to see him. His is a much more interesting case than mine. Besides, it's only

beginning, probably still at a hopeful stage, and so the lawyer likes handling it. You'll see a

difference later on." "Yes, yes," said Leni, regarding the tradesman laughingly, "what a

tongue-wagger!" Here she turned to K. and went on: "You mustn't believe a word he says.

He's a nice fellow but his tongue wags far too much. Perhaps that's why the lawyer can't

bear him. Anyhow, he never consents to see him unless he's in a good mood. I've tried my

best to change that, but it can't be done. Only fancy, sometimes I tell the lawyer Block is

here and he puts off seeing him for three days together. And then if Block isn't on the spot

when he's called for, his chance is gone and I have to announce him all over again. That's

why I let Block sleep here, for it has happened before now that he has been rung for in the

middle of the night. So Block has to be ready night and day. It sometimes happens, too,

that the lawyer changes his mind, once he has discovered that Block actually is on the spot,

and refuses the interview." K. threw a questioning glance at the tradesman, who nodded

and said, with the same frankness as before, or perhaps merely discomposed by a feeling

of shame: "Yes, one becomes very dependent on one's lawyer in the course of time." "He's

just pretending to complain," said Leni, "for he likes sleeping here, as he has often told

me." She went over to a small door and pushed it open. "Would you like to see his

bedroom?" she asked. K. followed her and gazed from the threshold into a low-roofed

chamber with no window which had room only for a narrow bed. One had to climb over

the bedposts to get into the bed. At the head of it, in a recess in the wall, stood a candle, an

ink well, and a pen, carefully arranged beside a bundle of papers, probably documents

concerning the case. "So you sleep in the maid's room?" asked K., turning to the

tradesman. "Leni lets me have it," said he, "it's very convenient." K. gave him a long look;

the first impression he had had of the man was perhaps, after all, the right one; Block was a

man of experience, certainly, since his case had lasted for years, yet he had paid dearly for

his experience. Suddenly K. could no longer bear the sight of him. "Put him to bed," he

cried to Leni, who seemed not to comprehend what he meant. Yet what he wanted was to

get away to the lawyer and dismiss from his life not only Huld but Leni and the tradesman

too. Before he could reach the room, however, Block spoke to him in a low voice: "Herr

K." K. turned round angrily. "You've forgotten your promise," said the tradesman,

reaching out imploringly toward K. "You were going to tell me one of your secrets."

"True," said K., casting a glance also at Leni, who was regarding him attentively, "well,

listen then, though it's almost an open secret by this time. I'm going to the lawyer now to

dismiss him from my case." "Dismiss him !" exclaimed the tradesman; he sprang from his

seat and rushed round the kitchen with upraised arms, crying as he ran: "He's dismissing

the lawyer!" Leni made a grab at K. but Block got in her way, and she requited him with

her fists. Still clenching her fists, she chased after K., who was well ahead of her. He got

inside the lawyer's room before she caught up with him; he tried to close the door behind

him, but Leni put one foot in the crack and reached through it to grab his arm and haul him

back. K. caught her wrist and squeezed it so hard that she had to loose her hold with a

whimper. She did not dare to force her way right in, but K. made certain by turning the key in the lock. \*

"I've been waiting a long time for you," said the lawyer from his bed, laying on the

table a document which he had been reading by the light of a candle, and putting on a pair

of spectacles through which he scrutinized K. sharply. Instead of apologizing K. said: "I

shan't detain you long." This remark, as it was no apology, the lawyer ignored, saying: "I

shall not see you again at such a late hour." "That agrees with my intentions," retorted K.

The lawyer gave him a questioning look and said: "Sit down." "Since you ask me to," said

K., pulling up a chair to the bedside table and seating himself. "I fancied I heard you

locking the door," said the lawyer. "Yes," said K., "that was because of Leni." He was not

thinking of shielding anyone, but the lawyer went on: "Has she been pestering you again?"

"Pestering me?" asked K. "Yes," said the lawyer, chuckling until stopped by a fit of

coughing, after which he began to chuckle once more. "I suppose you can't have helped

noticing that she pesters you?" he asked, patting K.'s hand, which in his nervous distraction

he had put on the bedside table and now hastily withdrew. "You don't attach much

importance to it," went on the lawyer as K. remained silent. "So much the better. Or else I

might have had to apologize for her. It's a peculiarity of hers, which I have long forgiven

her and which I wouldn't mention now had it not been for your locking the door. This

peculiarity of hers, well, you're the last person I should have to explain it to, but you're

looking so bewildered that I feel I must, this peculiarity of hers consists in her finding

nearly all accused men attractive. She makes up to all of them, loves them all, and is

evidently also loved in return; she often tells me about these affairs to amuse me, when I

allow her. It doesn't surprise me so much as it seems to surprise you. If you have the right

eye for these things, you can see that accused men are often attractive. It's a remarkable

phenomenon, almost a natural law. For of course the fact of being accused makes no

alteration in a man's appearance that is immediately obvious and recognizable. These cases

are not like ordinary criminal cases, most of the defendants continue in their usual

vocations, and if they are in the hands of a good lawyer their interests don't suffer much.

And yet those who are experienced in such matters can pick out one after another all the

accused men in the largest of crowds. How do they know them? you will ask. I'm afraid

my answer won't seem satisfactory. They know them because accused men are always the

most attractive. It cannot be guilt that makes them attractive, for -- it behooves me to say

this as a lawyer, at least -- they aren't all guilty, and it can't be the justice of the penance

laid on them that makes them attractive in anticipation, for they aren't all going to be

punished, so it must be the mere charge preferred against them that in some way enhances

their attraction. Of course some are much more attractive than others. But they are all

attractive, even that wretched creature Block."

By the time the lawyer finished this harangue K. had completely regained his

composure, he had even nodded as if in complete agreement with the last words, whereas



he was really confirming his own long-cherished opinion that the lawyer invariably

attempted, as now, to bring in irrelevant generalizations in order to distract his attention from the main question, which was: how much actual work had been achieved in

furthering the case? Presumably the lawyer felt that K. was more hostile than usual, for

now he paused to give him the chance of putting in a word, and then asked, since K.

remained silent: "Did you come here this evening for some specific reason?" "Yes," said

K., shading the light of the candle a little with one hand so as to see the lawyer better. "I

came to tell you that I dispense with your services as from today." "Do I understand you

rightly?" asked the lawyer, half propping himself up in bed with one hand on the pillows.

"I expect so," said K., sitting bolt upright as if on guard. "Well, that's a plan we can at least

discuss," said the lawyer after a pause. "It's no plan, it's a fact," said K. "Maybe," said the

lawyer, "but we mustn't be in too much of a hurry." He used the word "we" as if he had no

intention of letting K. detach himself, as if he meant to remain at least K.'s adviser if not

his official agent. "It's not a hurried decision," said K., slowly getting up and retreating

behind his chair, "I have thought it well over, perhaps even for too long. It is my final

decision." "Then allow me a few comments," said the lawyer, throwing off his feather quilt

and sitting on the edge of the bed. His bare legs, sprinkled with white hairs, trembled with

cold. He asked K. to hand him a rug from the sofa. K. fetched the rug and said: "It's quite

unnecessary for you to expose yourself to a chill." "I have grave enough reasons for it,"

said the lawyer, wrapping the bed quilt round his shoulders and tucking the rug round his

legs. "Your uncle is a friend of mine, and I've grown fond of you, too, in the course of

time. I admit it freely. It's nothing to be ashamed of." This outburst of sentiment from the

old man was most unwelcome to K., for it compelled him to be more explicit in his

statements, which he would have liked to avoid, and disconcerted him too, as he frankly

admitted to himself, although without in the least affecting his decision. "I am grateful for

your friendly attitude," he said, "and I appreciate that you have done all you could do for

what you thought to be my advantage. But for some time now I have been growing

convinced that your efforts are not enough. I shall not, of course, attempt to thrust my

opinions on a man so much older and more experienced than myself; if I have unwittingly

seemed to do so, please forgive me, but I have grave enough reasons for it, to use your

own phrase, and I am convinced that it is necessary to take much more energetic steps in

this case of mine than have been taken so far." "I understand you," said the lawyer, "you

are feeling impatient." "I'm not impatient," said K., a little irritated and therefore less

careful in his choice of words, "you must have noticed on my very first visit here, when I

came with my uncle, that I did not take my case very seriously; if I wasn't forcibly

reminded of it, so to speak, I forgot it completely. Still my uncle insisted on my engaging

you as my representative, and I did so to please him. One would naturally have expected

the case to weigh even less on my conscience after that, since after all one engages a

lawyer to shift the burden a little on to his shoulders. But the very opposite of that resulted.

I was never so much plagued by my case as I have been since engaging you to represent

me. When I stood alone I did nothing at all, yet it hardly bothered me; after acquiring a

lawyer, on the other hand, I felt that the stage was set for something to happen, I waited

with unceasing and growing expectancy for your intervention, and you did nothing

whatever. I admit that you gave me information about the Court which I probably could

not have obtained elsewhere. But that is hardly adequate assistance for a man who feels this thing secretly encroaching upon him and literally touching him to the quick." K. had

pushed the chair away and now stood upright, his hands in his jacket pockets. "After a

certain stage in one's practice," said the lawyer quietly in a low voice, \* "nothing really

new ever happens. How many of my clients have reached the same point in their cases and

stood before me in exactly the same frame of mind as you and said the same things!"

"Well," said K., "then they were all as much in the right as I am. That doesn't counter my

arguments." "I wasn't trying to counter them," said the lawyer, "but I should like to add

that I expected you to show more judgment than the others, especially as I have given you

more insight into the workings of the Court and my own procedure than I usually give my

clients. And now I cannot help seeing that in spite of everything you haven't enough

confidence in me. You don't make things very easy for me." How the lawyer was humbling

himself before K.! And without any regard for his professional dignity, which was surely

most sensitive on this very point. Why was he doing it? If appearances spoke truly he was

in great demand as a lawyer and wealthy as well, the loss of K. as a client or the loss of his

fees could not mean much to such a man. Besides, he was an invalid and should himself

have contemplated the advisability of losing clients. Yet he was clinging to K. with an

insistence! Why? Was it personal affection for K.'s uncle, or did he really regard the case

as so extraordinary that he hoped to win prestige either from defending K. or -- a

possibility not to be excluded -- from pandering to his friends in the Court? His face

provided no clue, searchingly as K. scrutinized it. One could almost suppose that he was

deliberately assuming a blank expression, while waiting for the effect of his words. But he

was obviously putting too favorable an interpretation on K.'s silence when he went on to

say: "You will have noticed that although my office is large enough I don't employ any

assistants. That wasn't so in former years, there was a time when several young students of

the Law worked for me, but today I work alone. This change corresponds in part to the

change in my practice, for I have been confining myself more and more to cases like yours,

and in part to a growing conviction that has been borne in upon me. I found that I could not

delegate the responsibility for these cases to anyone else without wronging my clients and

imperiling the tasks I had undertaken. But the decision to cover all the work myself

entailed the natural consequences: I had to refuse most of the cases brought to me and

apply myself only to those which touched me nearly -- and I can tell you there's no lack of

wretched creatures even in this very neighborhood, ready to fling themselves on any crumb

I choose to throw them. And then I broke down under stress of overwork. All the same, I

don't regret my decision, perhaps I ought to have taken a firmer stand and refused more

cases, but the policy of devoting myself singlemindedly to the cases I did accept has

proved both absolutely necessary and has been justified by the results. I once read a very

finely worded description of the difference between a lawyer for ordinary legal rights and a

lawyer for cases like these. It ran like this: the one lawyer leads his client by a slender

thread until the verdict is reached, but the other lifts his client on his shoulders from the

start and carries him bodily without once letting him down until the verdict is reached, and

even beyond it. That is true. But it is not quite true to say that I do not at all regret devoting

myself to this great task. When, as in your case, my labors are as completely misunderstood, then, yes, then and only then, I come near to regretting it." \* This

speech, instead of convincing K., only made him impatient. He fancied that the very tone

of the lawyer's voice suggested what was in store for him should he yield; the same old

exhortations would begin again, the same references to the progress of the petition, to the

more gracious mood of this or that official, while not forgetting the enormous difficulties

that stood in the way -- in short, the same stale platitudes would be brought out again either

to delude him with vague false hopes or to torment him with equally vague menaces. That

must be stopped once and for all, so he said: "What steps do you propose to take in my

case if I retain you as my representative?" The lawyer meekly accepted even this insulting

question and replied: "I should continue with those measures that I have already begun." "I

knew it," said K., "well, it's a waste of time to go on talking." "I'll make one more attempt,"

said the lawyer, as if it were K. who was at fault and not himself. "I have an idea that what

makes you so wrongheaded not only in your judgment of my legal assistance but also in

your general behavior is the fact that you have been treated too well, although you are an

accused man, or rather, more precisely, that you have been treated with negligence, with

apparent negligence. There's a reason for the negligence, of course; it's often better to be in

chains than to be free. But I'd like to show you how other accused men are treated, and

perhaps you may learn a thing or two. I shall now send for Block; you'd better unlock the

door and sit here beside the bed table." "With pleasure," said K., fulfilling these

injunctions; he was always ready to learn. As a precaution, however, he asked once more:



"You realize that I am dispensing with your services?" "Yes," said the lawyer, "but you

may change your mind about it yet." He lay back in bed again, drew the quilt up to his

chin, and turned his face to the wall. Then he rang the bell.

Almost at the same moment Leni was on the spot, darting quick glances to learn what

was happening; she seemed to find it reassuring that K. was sitting so quietly beside the

lawyer's bed. She nodded to him with a smile, but he gazed at her blankly. "Fetch Block,"

said the lawyer. Instead of fetching Block, however, she merely went to the door, called

out: "Block! The lawyer wants you !" and then, probably because the lawyer had his face

turned to the wall and was paying no attention to her, insinuated herself behind K., where

she distracted him during all the rest of the proceedings by leaning over the back of his

chair or running her fingers , gently and cautiously enough, through his hair and over his

temples. In the end K. sought to prevent her by holding on to her hand, which after a little

resistance she surrendered to him.

Block had answered the summons immediately, yet he hesitated outside the door,

apparently wondering whether he was to come in or not. He raised his eyebrows and

cocked his head as if listening for the summons to be repeated. K. could have encouraged

the man to come in, but he was determined to make a final break not only with the lawyer

but with all the persons in the house, and so he remained motionless. Leni too was silent.

Block noticed that at least no one was turning him away, and he tiptoed into the room with

anxious face and hands clutched behind him, leaving the door open to secure his retreat. He did not once look at K., but kept his eyes fixed on the humped-up quilt beneath which

the lawyer was not even visible, since he had shifted close up to the wall. A voice,

however, came from the bed, saying: "Is that Block?" This question acted like a blow upon

Block, who had advanced a goodish way; he staggered, as if he had been hit on the chest

and then beaten on the back, and, bowing deeply, stood still, answering: "At your service."

"What do you want?" asked the lawyer. "You've come at the wrong time." "Wasn't I called

for?" said Block, more to himself than to the lawyer, thrusting out his hands as if to guard

himself, and preparing to back out. "You were called for," said the lawyer, "and yet you've

come at the wrong time." After a pause he added: "You always come at the wrong time."

From the moment when the lawyer's voice was heard Block averted his eyes from the bed

and stood merely listening, gazing into a far corner, as if the sight of the lawyer were too

dazzling to bear. But it was difficult for him even to listen, since the lawyer was speaking

close to the wall and in a voice both low and quick. "Do you want me to go away?" asked

Block. "Well, since you're here," said the lawyer, "stay!" One might have fancied that

instead of granting Block his desire the lawyer had threatened to have him beaten, for the

fellow now begin to tremble in earnest. "Yesterday," said the lawyer, "I saw my friend the

Third Judge and gradually worked the conversation round to your case. Would you like to

know what he said?" "Oh, please," said Block. Since the lawyer made no immediate reply,

Block implored him again and seemed on the point of getting down on his knees. But K.

intervened with a shout: "What's that you're doing?" Leni had tried to stifle his shout and

so he gripped her other hand as well. It was no loving clasp in which he held her; she

sighed now and then and struggled to free herself. But it was Block who paid the penalty

for K.'s outburst; the lawyer shot the question at him: "Who is your lawyer?" "You are,"

said Block. "And besides me?" asked the lawyer. "No one beside you," said Block. "Then

pay no heed to anyone else," said the lawyer. Block took the full force of these words; he

gave K. an angry glare and shook his head violently at him. If these gestures had been

translated into speech they would have made a tirade of abuse. And this was the man with

whom K. had wished to discuss his own case in all friendliness! "I shan't interfere again,"

said K., leaning back in his chair. "Kneel on the floor or creep on all fours if you like, I

shan't bother." Yet Block had some self-respect left, at least where K. was concerned, for

he advanced upon him flourishing his fists and shouting as loudly as he dared in the

lawyer's presence: "You're not to talk to me in that tone, it isn't allowed. What do you

mean by insulting me? Before the lawyer, too, who admits us here, both of us, you and me,

only out of charity? You're no better than I am, you're an accused man too and are

involved in a case like me. If none the less you're a gentleman as well, let me tell you I'm

as great a gentleman as you, if not a greater. And I'll have you address me as such, yes, you

especially. For if you think you have the advantage of me because you're allowed to sit

there at your ease and watch me creeping on all fours, as you put it, let me remind you of

the old maxim: people under suspicion are better moving than at rest, since at rest they

may be sitting in the balance without knowing it, being weighed together with their sins."

K. said not a word, he merely stared in unwinking astonishment at this madman. What a

change had come over the fellow in the last hour! Was it his case that agitated him to such

an extent that he could not distinguish friend from foe? Did he not see that the lawyer was deliberately humiliating him, for no other purpose on this occasion than to make a display

of his power before K. and so perhaps cow K. into acquiescence as well? Yet if Block

were incapable of perceiving this, or if he were so afraid of the lawyer that he could not

allow himself to perceive it, how did it come about that he was sly enough or brave enough

to deceive the lawyer and deny that he was having recourse to other lawyers? And how

could he be so foolhardy as to attack K., knowing that K. might betray his secret? His

foolhardiness went even further, he now approached the lawyer's bed and laid a complaint

against K. "Dr. Huld," he said, "did you hear what this man said to me? His case is only a

few hours old compared with mine, and yet, though I have been five years involved in my

case, he takes it on himself to give me advice. He even abuses me. Knows nothing at all

and abuses me, me, who have studied as closely as my poor wits allow every precept of

duty, piety, and tradition." "Pay no heed to anyone," said the lawyer, "and do what seems

right to yourself." "Certainly," said Block, as if to give himself confidence, and then with a

hasty side-glance knelt down close beside the bed. "I'm on my knees, Dr. Huld," he said.

But the lawyer made no reply. \* Block cautiously caressed the quilt with one hand. In

the silence that now reigned Leni said, freeing herself from K.: "You're hurting me. Let go.

I want to be with Block." She went over and sat on the edge of the bed. Block was greatly

pleased by her coming; he made lively gestures, though in dumb show, imploring her to

plead his cause with the lawyer. Obviously he was urgently in need of any information

which the lawyer might give, but perhaps he only wanted to hand it on to his other lawyers

for exploitation. Leni apparently knew exactly the right way to coax the lawyer; she

pointed to his hand and pouted her lips as if giving a kiss. Block immediately kissed the

hand, repeating the performance twice at Leni's instigation. But the lawyer remained

persistently unresponsive. Then Leni, displaying the fine lines of her taut figure, bent over

close to the old man's face and stroked his long white hair. That finally evoked an answer.

"I hesitate to tell him," said the lawyer, and one could see him shaking his head, perhaps

only the better to enjoy the pressure of Leni's hand. Block listened with downcast eyes, as

if he were breaking a law by listening. "Why do you hesitate?" asked Leni. K. had the

feeling that he was listening to a well-rehearsed dialogue which had been often repeated

and would be often repeated and only for Block would never lose its novelty. "How has he

been behaving today?" inquired the lawyer instead of answering. Before providing this

information Leni looked down at Block and watched him for a moment as he raised his

hands toward her and clasped them appealingly together. At length she nodded gravely,

turned to the lawyer, and said: "He has been quiet and industrious." An elderly

businessman, a man with a long beard, begging a young girl to say a word in his favor! Let

him make what private reservations he would, in the eyes of his fellow men he could find

no justification. K. did not understand how the lawyer could ever have imagined that this

performance would win him over. If the lawyer had not already succeeded in alienating

him, this scene would have finished him once and for all. It was humiliating even to an

onlooker. So the lawyer's methods, to which K. fortunately had not been long enough

exposed, amounted to this: that the client finally forgot the whole world and lived only in

hope of toiling along this false path until the end of his case should come in sight. The

client ceased to be a client and became the lawyer's dog. If the lawyer were to order this man to crawl under the bed as if into a kennel and bark there, he would gladly obey the

order. K. listened to everything with critical detachment, as if he had been commissioned



to observe the proceedings closely, to report them to a higher authority, and to put down a

record of them in writing. "What has he been doing all day?" went on the lawyer. "I locked

him into the maid's room," said Leni, "to keep him from disturbing me at my work, that's

where he usually stays, anyhow. And I could peep at him now and then through the

ventilator to see what he was doing. He was kneeling all the time on the bed, reading the

papers you lent him, which were spread out on the window sill. That made a good

impression on me, since the window looks out on an air shaft and doesn't give much light.

So the way Block stuck to his reading showed me how faithfully he does what he is told."

"I'm glad to hear that," said the lawyer. "But did he understand what he was reading?" All

this time Block's lips were moving unceasingly; he was obviously formulating the answers

he hoped Leni would make. "Well, of course," said Leni, "that's something I don't know

with certainty. At any rate, I could tell that he was thorough in his reading. He never got

past the same page all day and he was following the lines with his fingers. Whenever I

looked at him he was sighing to himself as if the reading cost him a great effort.

Apparently the papers you gave him to read are difficult to understand."  
"Yes," said the

lawyer, "these scriptures are difficult enough. I don't believe he really understands them.

They're meant only to give him an inkling how hard the struggle is that I have to carry on

in his defense. And for whom do I carry on this hard struggle? It's almost ridiculous to put

it into words -- I do it for Block. He must learn to understand what that means. Did he read

without stopping?" "Almost without a stop," answered Leni, "he asked me only once for a

drink of water, and I handed it to him through the ventilator. Then at about eight o'clock I

let him out and gave him something to eat." Block gave a fleeting glance at K. as if

expecting to see him impressed by this virtuous record. His hopes seemed to be mounting,

his movements were less constrained, and he kept shifting his knees a little. It was all the

more noticeable that the lawyer's next words struck him rigid. "You are praising him," said

the lawyer. "But that only makes it more difficult for me to tell him. For the Judge's

remarks were by no means favorable either to Block or to his case." "Not favorable?"

asked Leni. "How can that be possible?" Block was gazing at her as intently as if he

believed her capable of giving a new and favorable turn to the words long pronounced by

the Judge. "Not favorable," said the lawyer. "He was even annoyed when I mentioned

Block. 'Don't speak about Block,' he said. 'But he's my client,' I said. 'You are wasting

yourself on the man,' he said. 'I don't think his case is hopeless,' said I. 'Well, you're

wasting yourself on him,' he repeated. 'I don't believe it,' said I, 'Block is sincerely

concerned about his case and devotes himself to it. He almost lives in my house to keep in

touch with the proceedings. One doesn't often find such zeal. Of course, he's personally

rather repulsive, his manners are bad, and he is dirty, but as a client he is beyond reproach' -

- I said 'beyond reproach,' and it was a deliberate exaggeration. To that he replied: 'Block

is merely cunning. He has acquired a lot of experience and knows how to keep on

postponing the issue. But his ignorance is even greater than his cunning. What do you

think he would say if he discovered that his case had actually not begun yet, if he were to

be told that the bell marking the start of the proceedings hadn't even been rung ?` -- Quiet there, Block," said the lawyer, for Block was just rising up on trembling legs, obviously to

implore an explanation. This was the first time the lawyer had addressed Block directly at

any length. With lackluster eyes he looked down; his glance was partly vague and partly

turned upon Block, who slowly sank back under it on his knees again. "That remark of the

Judge's has no possible significance for you," said the lawyer. "Don't get into a panic at

every word. If you do it again I'll never tell you anything. I can't begin a statement without

your gazing at me as if your final sentence had come. You should be ashamed to behave

like that before my client. And you're destroying his confidence in me. What's the matter

with you? You're still alive, you're still under my protection. Your panic is senseless.

You've read somewhere or other that a man's condemnation often comes unexpectedly

from some chance person at some odd time. With many reservations that is certainly true,

but it is equally true that your panic disgusts me and appears to betray a lack of the

necessary confidence in me. All that I said was to report a remark made by a Judge. You

know quite well that in these matters opinions differ so much that the confusion is

impenetrable. This Judge, for instance, assumes that the proceedings begin at one point,

and I assume that they begin at another point. A difference of opinion, nothing more. At a

certain stage of the proceedings there is an old tradition that a bell must be rung.

According to the Judge, that marks the beginning of the case, I can't tell you now all the

arguments against him, you wouldn't understand them, let it be sufficient for you that there

are many arguments against his view." In embarrassment Block sat plucking at the hair of

the skin rug lying before the bed; his terror of the Judge's utterance was so great that it

ousted for a while his subjection to the lawyer and he was thinking only of himself, turning

the Judge's words round and surveying them from all sides. "Block," said Leni in a tone of

warning, catching him by the collar and jerking him upward a little. "Leave the rug alone

and listen to the lawyer."

This chapter was never completed. Chapter 9

In the Cathedral

AN ITALIAN colleague, who was on his first visit to the town and was one of the Bank's

most influential clients, was to be taken in charge by K. and shown some of the town's art

treasures and monuments. It was a commission that K. would once have felt to be an

honor, but at the present juncture, now that all his energies were needed even to retain his

prestige in the Bank, he accepted it reluctantly. Every hour that he spent away from the

Bank was a trial to him; true, he was by no means able to make the best use of his office

hours as once he had done, he wasted much time in the merest pretense of doing real work,

but that only made him worry the more when he was not at his desk. In his mind he

saw the Assistant Manager, who had always spied upon him, prowling every now and then

into his office, sitting down at his desk, running through his papers, receiving clients who

had become almost old friends of K.'s in the course of many years, and luring them away

from him, perhaps even discovering mistakes that he had made, for K. now saw himself

continually threatened by mistakes intruding into his work from all sides which he was no

longer able to circumvent. Consequently if he were charged with a mission, however

honorable, which involved his leaving the office on business or even taking a short journey

-- and missions of that kind by some chance had recently come his way fairly often -- then

he could not help suspecting that there was a plot to get him out of the way while his work

was investigated, or at least that he was considered far from indispensable in the office.

Most of these missions he could easily have refused. Yet he did not dare do so, since, if

there were even the smallest ground for his suspicions, a refusal to go would only have

been taken as an admission of fear. For that reason he accepted every one of them with

apparent equanimity, and on one occasion when he was expected to take an exhausting two

days' journey he even said nothing about a severe chill he had, to avoid the risk of having

the prevailing wet autumnal weather advanced as an excuse for his not going. When he

came back from this journey with a racking headache, he discovered that he had been

selected to act as escort next day for the Italian visitor. The temptation to refuse, for this

once, was very great, especially since the charge laid upon him was not strictly a matter of

business; still, it was a social duty toward a colleague and doubtless important enough,

only it was of no importance to himself, knowing, as he did, that nothing could save him

except work well done, in default of which it would not be of the slightest use to him in the

unlikely event that the Italian were to find him the most enchanting companion; he shrank

from being exiled from his work even for a single day, since he had too great a fear of not

being allowed to return, a fear which he well knew to be exaggerated, but which oppressed

him all the same. The difficulty on this occasion was to find a plausible excuse; his

knowledge of Italian was certainly not very great, but it was at least adequate, and there

was a decisive argument in the fact that he had some knowledge of art, acquired in earlier days, which was absurdly overestimated in the Bank owing to his having been for some

time, purely as a matter of business, a member of the Society for the Preservation of

Ancient Monuments. Rumor had it that the Italian was also a connoisseur, and if so, the



choice of K. to be his escort seemed the natural one.

It was a very wet and windy morning when K. arrived in his office at the early hour of

seven o'clock, full of irritation at the program before him, but determined to accomplish at

least some work before being distracted from it by the visitor. He was very tired, for he

had spent half the night studying an Italian grammar as some slight preparation; he was

more tempted by the window, where he had recently been in the habit of spending too

much time, than by his desk, but he resisted the temptation and sat down to work.

Unfortunately at that very moment the attendant appeared, reporting that he had been sent

by the Manager to see if the Chief Clerk was in his office yet, and, if he was, to beg him to

be so good as to come to the reception room; the gentleman from Italy had already arrived.

"All right," said K., stuffed a small dictionary into his pocket, tucked under his arm an

album for sightseers, which he had procured in readiness for the stranger, and went

through the Assistant Manager's office into the Manager's room. He was glad that he had

turned up early enough to be on the spot immediately when required;  
probably no one had

really expected him to do so. The Assistant Manager's office, of course, was  
as empty as in

the dead of night; very likely the attendant had been told to summon him  
too, and without

result. When K. entered the reception room the two gentlemen rose from  
their deep

armchairs. The Manager smiled kindly on K., he was obviously delighted to  
see him, he

performed the introduction at once, the Italian shook K. heartily by the hand  
and said

laughingly that someone was an early riser. K. did not quite catch whom he  
meant, for it

was an unfamiliar phrase the sense of which did not dawn on him at once.  
He answered

with a few fluent sentences which the Italian received with another laugh,  
meanwhile

nervously stroking his bushy iron-gray mustache. This mustache was  
obviously perfumed;

one was almost tempted to go. close up and have a sniff at it. When they all  
sat down again

and a preliminary conversation began, K. was greatly disconcerted to find  
that he only

partly understood what the Italian was saying. He could understand him  
almost completely

when he spoke slowly and quietly, but that happened very seldom, the words mostly came

pouring out in a flood, and he made lively gestures with his head as if enjoying the rush of

talk. Besides, when this happened, he invariably relapsed into a dialect which K. did not

recognize as Italian but which the Manager could both speak and understand, as indeed K.

might have expected, considering that this Italian came from the very south of Italy, where

the Manager had spent several years. At any rate, it became clear to K. that there was little

chance of communication with the Italian, for the man's French was difficult to follow and

it was no use watching his lips for clues, since their movements were covered by the bushy

mustache. K. began to foresee vexations and for the moment gave up trying to follow the

talk -- while the Manager was present to understand all that was said it was an unnecessary

effort to make -- confining himself to morose observation of the Italian lounging so

comfortably and yet lightly in his armchair, tugging every now and then at the sharply

peaked corners of his short little jacket, and once raising his arms with loosely fluttering hands to explain something \* which K. found it impossible to understand, although he

was leaning forward to watch every gesture. In the end, as K. sat there taking no part in the

conversation, only mechanically following with his eyes the see-saw of the dialogue, his

earlier weariness made itself felt again, and to his horror, although fortunately just in time,

he caught himself absent-mindedly rising to turn round and walk away. At long last the

Italian looked at his watch and sprang to his feet. After taking leave of the Manager he

pressed up to K. so close that K. had to push his chair back in order to have any freedom of

movement. The Manager, doubtless seeing in K.'s eye that he was in desperate straits with

this unintelligible Italian, intervened so cleverly and delicately that it appeared as if he

were merely contributing little scraps of advice, while in reality he was briefly conveying

to K. the sense of all the remarks with which the Italian kept on interrupting him. In this

way K. learned that the Italian had some immediate business to attend to, that

unfortunately he was pressed for time, that he had no intention of rushing round to see all

the sights in a hurry, that he would much rather -- of course only if K. agreed, the decision

lay with K. alone -- confine himself to inspecting the Cathedral, but to inspect that

thoroughly. He was extremely delighted to have the chance of doing so in the company of

such a learned and amiable gentleman -- this was how he referred to K., who was trying

hard to turn a deaf ear to his words and grasp as quickly as possible what the Manager was

saying -- and he begged him, if it were convenient, to meet him there in a couple of hours,

say at about ten o'clock. He had hopes of being able to arrive there for certain about that

time. K. made a suitable rejoinder, the Italian pressed the Manager's hand, then K.'s hand,

then the Manager's hand again, and, followed by both of them, turning only half toward

them by this time but still maintaining a flow of words, departed toward the door. K.

stayed a moment or two with the Manager, who was looking particularly unwell that day.

He felt that he owed K. an apology and said -- they were standing intimately together --

that he had at first intended to escort the Italian himself, but on second thoughts -- he gave

no definite reason -- he had decided that K. had better go. If K. found that he could not

understand the man to begin with he mustn't let that upset him, for he wouldn't take long to

catch the sense of what was said, and even if he didn't understand very much it hardly

mattered, since the Italian cared little whether he was understood or not. Besides, K.'s

knowledge of Italian was surprisingly good and he would certainly acquit himself well.

With that K. was dismissed to his room. The time still at his disposal he devoted to

copying from the dictionary various unfamiliar words which he would need in his tour of

the Cathedral. It was an unusually exasperating task; attendants came in with letters, clerks

arrived with inquiries, standing in the doorway when they saw that K. was busy, yet not

removing themselves until he answered, the Assistant Manager did not miss the chance of

making a nuisance of himself and appeared several times, taking the dictionary out of K.'s

hand and with obvious indifference turning the pages over; even clients were dimly visible

in the antechamber whenever the door opened, making deprecating bows to call attention

to themselves, but uncertain whether they had been remarked or not -- all this activity

rotated around K. as if he were the center of it, while he himself was occupied in collecting

the words he might need, looking them up in the dictionary, copying them out, practicing

their pronunciation, and finally trying to learn them by heart. His once excellent memory seemed to have deserted him, and every now and then he grew so furious with the Italian

who was causing him all this trouble that he stuffed the dictionary beneath a pile of papers

with the firm intention of preparing himself no further, yet he could not help seeing that it

would not do to march the Italian round the art treasures of the Cathedral in dumb silence,

and so with even greater rage he took the dictionary out again.

Just at half past nine, as he was rising to go, the telephone rang; Leni bade him good

morning and asked how he was; K. thanked her hastily and said he had no time to talk to

her, since he must go to the Cathedral. "To the Cathedral?" asked Leni. "Yes, to the

Cathedral." "But why the Cathedral?" asked Leni. K. tried to explain briefly to her, but

hardly had he begun when Leni suddenly said: "They're goading you." Pity which he had

not asked for and did not expect was more than K. could bear, he said two words of

farewell, but even as he hung up the receiver he murmured half to himself and half to the

faraway girl who could no longer hear him: "Yes, they're goading me"

By now it was growing late, he was already in danger of not being in time for the

appointment. He drove off in a taxicab; at the last moment he remembered the album

which he had found no opportunity of handing over earlier, and so took it with him now.

He laid it on his knees and drummed on it impatiently with his fingers during the whole of

the journey. The rain had slackened, but it was a raw, wet, murky day, one would not be

able to see much in the Cathedral, and there was no doubt that standing about on the cold

stone flags would make K.'s chill considerably worse.

The Cathedral Square was quite deserted, and K. recollected how even as a child he

had been struck by the fact that in the houses of this narrow square nearly all the window

blinds were invariably drawn down. On a day like this, of course, it was more

understandable. The Cathedral seemed deserted too, there was naturally no reason why

anyone should visit it at such a time. K. went through both of the side aisles and saw no



one but an old woman muffled in a shawl who was kneeling before a Madonna with

adoring eyes. Then in the distance he caught sight of a limping verger vanishing through a

door in the wall. K. had been punctual, ten o'clock was striking just as he entered, but the

Italian had not yet arrived. He went back to the main entrance, stood there undecidedly for

a while and then made the circuit of the building in the rain, to make sure that the Italian

was perhaps not waiting at some side door. He was nowhere to be seen. Could the

Manager have made some mistake about the hour? How could anyone be quite sure of

understanding such a man? Whatever the circumstances, K. would at any rate have to wait

half an hour for him. Since he was tired he felt like sitting down, went into the Cathedral

again, found on a step a remnant of carpet-like stuff, twitched it with his toe toward a nearby

bench, wrapped himself more closely in his greatcoat, turned up his collar, and sat

down. By way of filling in time he opened the album and ran idly through it, but he soon

had to stop, for it was growing so dark that when he looked up he could distinguish

scarcely a single detail in the neighboring aisle. Away in the distance a large triangle of candle flames glittered on the high altar; K.

could not have told with any certainty whether he had noticed them before or not. Perhaps

they had been newly kindled. Vergers are by profession stealthy-footed, one never notices

them. K. happened to turn round and saw not far behind him the gleam of another candle, a

tall thick candle fixed to a pillar. It was lovely to look at, but quite inadequate for

illuminating the altarpieces, which mostly hung in the darkness of the side chapels; it

actually increased the darkness. The Italian was as sensible as he was discourteous in not

coming, for he would have seen nothing, he would have had to content himself with

scrutinizing a few pictures piecemeal by the light of K.'s pocket torch. Curious to see what

effect it would have, K. went up to a small side chapel near by, mounted a few steps to a

low balustrade, and bending over it shone his torch on the altarpiece. The light from a

permanent oil-lamp hovered over it like an intruder. The first thing K. perceived, partly by

guess, was a huge armored knight on the outermost verge of the picture. He was leaning on

his sword, which was stuck into the bare ground, bare except for a stray blade of grass or

two. He seemed to be watching attentively some event unfolding itself before his eyes. It

was surprising that he should stand so still without approaching nearer to it. Perhaps he had

been set there to stand guard. K., who had not seen any pictures for a long time, studied

this knight for a good while, although the greenish light of the oil-lamp made his eyes

blink. When he played the torch over the rest of the altarpiece he discovered that it was a

portrayal of Christ being laid in the tomb, conventional in style and a fairly recent painting.

He pocketed the torch and returned again to his seat.

In all likelihood it was now unnecessary to wait any longer for the Italian, but the rain

was probably pouring down outside, and since it was not so cold in the Cathedral as K. had

expected, he decided to stay there for the present. Quite near him rose the great pulpit, on

its small vaulted canopy two plain golden crucifixes were slanted so that their shafts

crossed at the tip. The outer balustrade and the stonework connecting it with the supporting

column were wrought all over with foliage in which little angels were entangled, now

vivacious and now serene. K. went up to the pulpit and examined it from all sides; the

carving of the stonework was very carefully wrought, the deep caverns of darkness among

and behind the foliage looked as if caught and imprisoned there; K. put his hand into one

of them and cautiously felt the contour of the stone; he had never known that this pulpit

existed. By pure chance he noticed a verger standing behind the nearest row of benches, a

man in a loose-hanging black garment with a snuffbox in his left hand; he was gazing at K.

"What's the man after?" thought K. "Do I look a suspicious character? Does he want a tip

?" But when he saw that K. had become aware of him, the verger started pointing with his

right hand, still holding a pinch of snuff in his fingers, in some vaguely indicated direction.

His gestures seemed to have little meaning. K. hesitated for a while, but the verger did not

cease pointing at something or other and emphasizing the gesture with nods of his head.

"What does the man want?" said K. in a low tone, he did not dare to raise his voice in this

place; then he pulled out his purse and made his way along the benches toward him. But

the verger at once made a gesture of refusal, shrugged his shoulders, and limped away.

With something of the same gait, a quick, limping motion, K. had often as a child imitated a man riding on horseback. "A childish old man," thought K., "with only wits enough to be

a verger. How he stops when I stop and peers to see if I am following him!" Smiling to

himself, K. went on following him through the side aisle almost as far as the high altar; the

old man kept pointing at something, but K. deliberately refrained from looking round to

see what he was pointing at, the gesture could have no other purpose than to shake K. off.

At last he desisted from the pursuit, he did not want to alarm the old man too much;

besides, in case the Italian were to turn up after all, it might be better not to scare away the

verger.

As he returned to the nave to find the seat on which he had left the album, K. caught

sight of a small side pulpit attached to a pillar almost immediately adjoining the choir, a

simple pulpit of plain, pale stone. It was so small that from a distance it looked like an

empty niche intended for a statue. There was certainly no room for the preacher to take a

full step backward from the balustrade. The vaulting of the stone canopy, too, began very

low down and curved forward and upward, although without ornamentation, in such a way

that a medium-sized man could not stand upright beneath it, but would have to keep

leaning over the balustrade. The whole structure was designed as if to torture the preacher;

there seemed no comprehensible reason why it should be there at all while the other pulpit,

so large and finely decorated, was available.

And K. certainly would not have noticed it had not a lighted lamp been fixed above it,

the usual sign that a sermon was going to be preached. Was a sermon going to be delivered

now? In the empty church? K. peered down at the small flight of steps which led upward to

the pulpit, hugging the pillar as it went, so narrow that it looked like an ornamental

addition to the pillar rather than a stairway for human beings. But at the foot of it, K.

smiled in astonishment, there actually stood a priest ready to ascend, with his hand on the

balustrade and his eyes fixed on K. The priest gave a little nod and K. crossed himself and

bowed, as he ought to have done earlier. The priest swung himself lightly on to the

stairway and mounted into the pulpit with short, quick steps. Was he really going to preach

a sermon? Perhaps the verger was not such an imbecile after all and had been trying to

urge K. toward the preacher, a highly necessary action in that deserted building. But

somewhere or other there was an old woman before an image of the Madonna; she ought

to be there too. And if it were going to be a sermon, why was it not introduced by the

organ? But the organ remained silent, its tall pipes looming faintly in the darkness.

K. wondered whether this was not the time to remove himself quickly; if he did not

go now he would have no chance of doing so during the sermon, he would have to stay as

long as it lasted, he was already behindhand in the office and was no longer obliged to wait

for the Italian; he looked at his watch, it was eleven o'clock. But was there really going to

be a sermon? Could K. represent the congregation all by himself? What if he had been a

stranger merely visiting the church? That was more or less his position. It was absurd to

think that a sermon was going to be preached at eleven in the morning on a weekday, in

such dreadful weather. The priest -- he was beyond doubt a priest, a young man with a smooth, dark face -- was obviously mounting the pulpit simply to turn out the lamp, which

had been lit by mistake.

It was not so, however; the priest after examining the lamp screwed it higher instead,

then turned slowly toward the balustrade and gripped the angular edge with both hands. He

stood like that for a while, looking around him without moving his head. K. had retreated a

good distance and was leaning his elbows on the foremost pew. Without knowing exactly

where the verger was stationed, he was vaguely aware of the old man's bent back,

peacefully at rest as if his task had been fulfilled. What stillness there was now in the

Cathedral! Yet K. had to violate it, for he was not minded to stay; if it were this priest's

duty to preach a sermon at a certain hour regardless of circumstances, let him do it, he

could manage it without K.'s support, just as K.'s presence would certainly not contribute



to its effectiveness. So he began slowly to move off, feeling his way along the pew on

tiptoe until he was in the broad center aisle, where he advanced undisturbed except for the

ringing noise that his lightest footstep made on the stone flags and the echoes that sounded

from the vaulted roof faintly but continuously, in manifold and regular progression. K. felt

a little forlorn as he advanced, a solitary figure between the rows of empty seats, perhaps

with the priest's eyes following him; and the size of the Cathedral struck him as bordering

on the limit of what human beings could bear. When he came to the seat where he had left

the album he simply snatched the book up without stopping and took it with him. He had

almost passed the last of the pews and was emerging into the open space between himself

and the doorway when he heard the priest lifting up his voice. A resonant, well-trained

voice. How it rolled through the expectant Cathedral! But it was no congregation the priest

was addressing, the words were unambiguous and inescapable, he was calling out: "Joseph

K.!"

K. paused and stared at the ground before him. For the moment he was still free, he

could continue on his way and vanish through one of the small, dark, wooden doors that

faced him at no great distance. It would simply indicate that he had not understood the call,

or that he had understood it and did not care. But if he were to turn round he would be

caught, for that would amount to an admission that he had understood it very well, that he

was really the person addressed, and that he was ready to obey. Had the priest called his

name a second time K. would certainly have gone on, but as everything remained silent,

though he stood waiting a long time, he could not help turning his head a little just to see

what the priest was doing. The priest was standing calmly in the pulpit as before, yet it was

obvious that he had observed K.'s turn of the head. It would have been like a childish game

of hide-and-seek if K. had not turned right round to face him. He did so, and the priest

beckoned him to come nearer. Since there was now no need for evasion, K. hurried back --

he was both curious and eager to shorten the interview -- with long flying strides toward

the pulpit. At the first rows of seats he halted, but the priest seemed to think the distance

still too great; he stretched out an arm and pointed with sharply bent forefinger to a spot

immediately before the pulpit. K. followed this direction too; when he stood on the spot

indicated he had to bend his head far back to see the priest at all. "You are Joseph K.," said the priest, lifting one hand from the balustrade in a vague gesture. "Yes," said K., thinking

how frankly he used to give his name and what a burden it had recently become to him;

nowadays people he had never seen before seemed to know his name. How pleasant it was

to have to introduce oneself before being recognized! "You are an accused man," said the

priest in a very low voice. "Yes," said K., "so I have been informed." "Then you are the

man I seek," said the priest. "I am the prison chaplain." "Indeed," said K. "I had you

summoned here," said the priest, "to have a talk with you." "I didn't know that," said K. "I

came here to show an Italian round the Cathedral." "That is beside the point," said the

priest. "What is that in your hand? Is it a prayer book?" "No," replied K., "it is an album of

sights worth seeing in the town." "Lay it down," said the priest. K. threw it away so

violently that it flew open and slid some way along the floor with disheveled leaves. "Do

you know that your case is going badly?" asked the priest. "I have that idea myself," said

K. "I've done what I could, but without any success so far. Of course, my petition isn't

finished yet." "How do you think it will end?" asked the priest. "At first I thought it must

turn out well," said K., "but now I frequently have my doubts. I don't know how it will

end. Do you?" "No," said the priest, "but I fear it will end badly. You are held to be guilty.

Your case will perhaps never get beyond a lower Court. Your guilt is supposed, for the

present, at least, to have been proved." "But I am not guilty," said K.; "it's a mistake. And,

if it comes to that, how can any man be called guilty? We are all simply men here, one as

much as the other." "That is true," said the priest, "but that's how all guilty men talk." "Are

you prejudiced against me too?" asked K. "I have no prejudices against you," said the

priest. "Thank you," said K.; "but all the others who are concerned in these proceedings are

prejudiced against me. They are influencing outsiders too. My position is becoming more

and more difficult." "You are misinterpreting the facts of the case," said the priest. "The

verdict is not suddenly arrived at, the proceedings only gradually merge into the verdict."

"So that's how it is," said K., letting his head sink. "What is the next step you propose to

take in the matter?" asked the priest. "I'm going to get more help," said K., looking up

again to see how the priest took his statement. "There are several possibilities I haven't

explored yet." "You cast about too much for outside help," said the priest disapprovingly,

"especially from women. Don't you see that it isn't the right kind of help?" "In some cases,

even in many I could agree with you," said K., "but not always. Women have great

influence. If I could move some women I know to join forces in working for me, I couldn't

help winning through. Especially before this Court, which consists almost entirely of

petticoat-hunters. Let the Examining Magistrate see a woman in the distance and he

knocks down his desk and the defendant in his eagerness to get at her." The priest leaned

over the balustrade, apparently feeling for the first time the oppressiveness of the canopy

above his head. What fearful weather there must be outside! There was no longer even a

murky daylight; black night had set in. All the stained glass in the great window could not

illumine the darkness of the wall with one solitary glimmer of light. And at this very

moment the verger began to put out the candles on the high altar, one after another. "Are

you angry with me?" asked K. of the priest. "It may be that you don't know the nature of

the Court you are serving." He got no answer. "These are only my personal experiences,"

said K. There was still no answer from above. "I wasn't trying to insult you," said K. And at that the priest shrieked from the pulpit: "Can't you see one pace before you?" It was an

angry cry, but at the same time sounded like the unwary shriek of one who sees another fall

and is startled out of his senses.

Both were now silent for a long time. In the prevailing darkness the priest certainly

could not make out K.'s features, while K. saw him distinctly by the light of the small

lamp. Why did he not come down from the pulpit? He had not preached a sermon, he had

only given K. some information which would be likely to harm him rather than help him

when he came to consider it. Yet the priest's good intentions seemed to K. beyond

question, it was not impossible that they could come to some agreement if the man would

only quit his pulpit, it was not impossible that K. could obtain decisive and acceptable

counsel from him which might, for instance, point the way, not toward some influential

manipulation of the case, but toward a circumvention of it, a breaking away from it

altogether, a mode of living completely outside the jurisdiction of the Court. This

possibility must exist, K. had of late given much thought to it. And should the priest know

of such a possibility, he might perhaps impart his knowledge if he were appealed to,

although he himself belonged to the Court and as soon as he heard the Court impugned had

forgotten his own gentle nature so far as to shout K. down. "Won't you come down here?"

said K. "You haven't got to preach a sermon. Come down beside me." "I can come down

now," said the priest, perhaps repenting of his outburst. While he detached the lamp from

its hook he said: "I had to speak to you first from a distance. Otherwise I am too easily

influenced and tend to forget my duty."

K. waited for him at the foot of the steps. The priest stretched out his hand to K. while

he was still on the way down from a higher level. "Have you a little time for me asked K.

"As much time as you need," said the priest, giving K. the small lamp to carry. Even close

at hand he still wore a certain air of solemnity. "You are very good to me," said K. They

paced side by side up and down the dusky aisle. "But you are an exception among those

who belong to the Court. I have more trust in you than in any of the others, though I know

many of them. With you I can speak openly." "Don't be deluded," said the priest. "How am

I being deluded?" asked K. "You are deluding yourself about the Court," said the priest.

"In the writings which preface the Law that particular delusion is described thus: before the

Law stands a doorkeeper. To this doorkeeper there comes a man from the country who

begs for admittance to the Law. But the doorkeeper says that he cannot admit the man at

the moment. The man, on reflection, asks if he will be allowed, then, to enter later. `It is



possible,' answers the doorkeeper, 'but not at this moment.' Since the door leading into the

Law stands open as usual and the doorkeeper steps to one side, the man bends down to

peer through the entrance. When the doorkeeper sees that, he laughs and says: 'If you are

so strongly tempted, try to get in without my permission. But note that I am powerful. And

I am only the lowest doorkeeper. From hail to hail, keepers stand at every door, one more

powerful than the other. And the sight of the third man is already more than even I can

stand.' These are difficulties which the man from the country has not expected to meet, the

Law, he thinks, should be accessible to every man and at all times, but when he looks more closely at the doorkeeper in his furred robe, with his huge pointed nose and long thin

Tartar beard, he decides that he had better wait until he gets permission to enter. The

doorkeeper gives him a stool and lets him sit down at the side of the door. There he sits

waiting for days and years. He makes many attempts to be allowed in and wearies the

doorkeeper with his importunity. The doorkeeper often engages him in brief conversation,

asking him about his home and about other matters, but the questions are put quite

impersonally, as great men put questions, and always conclude with the statement that the

man cannot be allowed to enter yet. The man, who has equipped himself with many things

for his journey, parts with all he has, however valuable, in the hope of bribing the

doorkeeper. The doorkeeper accepts it all, saying, however, as he takes each gift: 'I take

this only to keep you from feeling that you have left something undone.' During all these

long years the man watches the doorkeeper almost incessantly. He forgets about the other

doorkeepers, and this one seems to him the only barrier between himself and the Law. In

the first years he curses his evil fate aloud; later, as he grows old, he only mutters to

himself. He grows childish, and since in his prolonged study of the doorkeeper he has

learned to know even the fleas in his fur collar, he begs the very fleas to help him and to

persuade the doorkeeper to change his mind. Finally his eyes grow dim and he does not

know whether the world is really darkening around him or whether his eyes are only

deceiving him. But in the darkness he can now perceive a radiance that streams

inextinguishably from the door of the Law. Now his life is drawing to a close. Before he

dies, all that he has experienced during the whole time of his sojourn condenses in his

mind into one question, which he has never yet put to the doorkeeper. He beckons the

doorkeeper, since he can no longer raise his stiffening body. The doorkeeper has to bend

far down to hear him, for the difference in size between them has increased very much to

the man's disadvantage. 'What do you want to know now?' asks the doorkeeper, 'you are

insatiable.' 'Everyone strives to attain the Law,' answers the man, 'how does it come about,

then, that in all these years no one has come seeking admittance but me?' The doorkeeper

perceives that the man is nearing his end and his hearing is failing, so he bellows in his ear:

'No one but you could gain admittance through this door, since this door was intended for

you. I am now going to shut it.'

"So the doorkeeper deceived the man," said K. immediately, strongly attracted by the

story. "Don't be too hasty," said the priest, "don't take over someone else's opinion without

testing it. I have told you the story in the very words of the scriptures.  
There's no mention

of deception in it." "But it's clear enough," said K., "and your first  
interpretation of it was

quite right. The doorkeeper gave the message of salvation to the man only  
when it could

no longer help him." "He was not asked the question any earlier," said the  
priest, "and you

must consider, too, that he was only a doorkeeper, and as such fulfilled his  
duty." "What

makes you think he fulfilled his duty?" asked K. "He didn't fulfill it. His  
duty might have

been to keep all strangers away, but this man, for whom the door was  
intended, should

have been let in." "You have not enough respect for the written word and  
you are altering

the story," said the priest. "The story contains two important statements  
made by the

doorkeeper about admission to the Law, one at the beginning, the other at  
the end. The first statement is: that he cannot admit the man at the moment,  
and the other is: that this door

was intended only for the man. If there were a contradiction between the  
two, you would

be right and the doorkeeper would have deceived the man. But there is no  
contradiction.

The first statement, on the contrary, even implies the second. One could  
almost say that in

suggesting to the man the possibility of future admittance the doorkeeper is exceeding his

duty. At that time his apparent duty is only to refuse admittance and indeed many

commentators are surprised that the suggestion should be made at all, since the doorkeeper

appears to be a precisian with a stern regard for duty. He does not once leave his post

during these many years, and he does not shut the door until the very last minute; he is

conscious of the importance of his office, for he says: 'I am powerful'; he is respectful to

his superiors, for he says: 'I am only the lowest doorkeeper'; he is not garrulous, for during

all these years he puts only what are called 'impersonal questions'; he is not to be bribed,

for he says in accepting a gift: 'I take this only to keep you from feeling that you have left

something undone'; where his duty is concerned he is to be moved neither by pity nor rage,

for we are told that the man 'wearied the doorkeeper with his importunity'; and finally

even his external appearance hints at a pedantic character, the large, pointed nose and the

long, thin, black, Tartar beard. Could one imagine a more faithful doorkeeper? Yet the

doorkeeper has other elements in his character which are likely to advantage anyone

seeking admittance and which make it comprehensible enough that he should somewhat

exceed his duty in suggesting the possibility of future admittance. For it cannot be denied

that he is a little simple-minded and consequently a little conceited. Take the statements he

makes about his power and the power of the other doorkeepers and their dreadful aspect

which even he cannot bear to see -- I hold that these statements may be true enough, but

that the way in which he brings them out shows that his perceptions are confused by

simpleness of mind and conceit. The commentators note in this connection: 'The right

perception of any matter and a misunderstanding of the same matter do not wholly exclude

each other.' One must at any rate assume that such simpleness and conceit, however

sparingly manifest, are likely to weaken his defense of the door; they are breaches in the

character of the doorkeeper. To this must be added the fact that the doorkeeper seems to be

a friendly creature by nature, he is by no means always on his official dignity. In the very

first moments he allows himself the jest of inviting the man to enter in spite of the strictly

maintained veto against entry; then he does not, for instance, send the man away, but gives

him, as we are told, a stool and lets him sit down beside the door. The patience with which

he endures the man's appeals during so many years, the brief conversations, the acceptance

of the gifts, the politeness with which he allows the man to curse loudly in his presence the

fate for which he himself is responsible -- all this lets us deduce certain feelings of pity.

Not every doorkeeper would have acted thus. And finally, in answer to a gesture of the

man's he bends down to give him the chance of putting a last question. Nothing but mild

impatience -- the doorkeeper knows that this is the end of it all -- is discernible in the

words: 'You are insatiable.' Some push this mode of interpretation even further and hold

that these words express a kind of friendly admiration, though not without a hint of

condescension. At any rate the figure of the doorkeeper can be said to come out very

differently from what you fancied." "You have studied the story more exactly and for a longer time than I have," said K. They were both silent for a little while. Then K. said: "So

you think the man was not deceived?" "Don't misunderstand me," said the priest, "I am

only showing you the various opinions concerning that point. You must not pay too much

attention to them. The scriptures are unalterable and the comments often enough merely

express the commentators' despair. In this case there even exists an interpretation which

claims that the deluded person is really the doorkeeper." "That's a far-fetched

interpretation," said K. "On what is it based?" "It is based," answered the priest, "on the

simple-mindedness of the doorkeeper. The argument is that he does not know the Law

from inside, he knows only the way that leads to it, where he patrols up and down. His

ideas of the interior are assumed to be childish, and it is supposed that he himself is afraid

of the other guardians whom he holds up as bogies before the man. Indeed, he fears them

more than the man does, since the man is determined to enter after hearing about the

dreadful guardians of the interior, while the doorkeeper has no desire to enter, at least not

so far as we are told. Others again say that he must have been in the interior already, since



he is after all engaged in the service of the Law and can only have been appointed from

inside. This is countered by arguing that he may have been appointed by a voice calling

from the interior, and that anyhow he cannot have been far inside, since the aspect of the

third doorkeeper is more than he can endure. Moreover, no indication is given that during

all these years he ever made any remarks showing a knowledge of the interior, except for

the one remark about the doorkeepers. He may have been forbidden to do so, but there is

no mention of that either. On these grounds the conclusion is reached that he knows

nothing about the aspect and significance of the interior, so that he is in a state of delusion.

But he is deceived also about his relation to the man from the country, for he is inferior to

the man and does not know it. He treats the man instead as his own subordinate, as can be

recognized from many details that must be still fresh in your mind. But, according to this

view of the story, it is just as clearly indicated that he is really subordinated to the man. In

the first place, a bondman is always subject to a free man. Now the man from the country

is really free, he can go where he likes, it is only the Law that is closed to him, and access

to the Law is forbidden him only by one individual, the doorkeeper. When he sits down on

the stool by the side of the door and stays there for the rest of his life, he does it of his own

free will; in the story there is no mention of any compulsion. But the doorkeeper is bound

to his post by his very office, he does not dare go out into the country, nor apparently may

he go into the interior of the Law, even should he wish to. Besides, although he is in the

service of the Law, his service is confined to this one entrance; that is to say, he serves

only this man for whom alone the entrance is intended. On that ground too he is inferior to

the man. One must assume that for many years, for as long as it takes a man to grow up to

the prime of life, his service was in a sense an empty formality, since he had to wait for a

man to come, that is to say someone in the prime of life, and so he had to wait a long time

before the purpose of his service could be fulfilled, and, moreover, had to wait on the

man's pleasure, for the man came of his own free will. But the termination of his service

also depends on the man's term of life, so that to the very end he is subject to the man. And

it is emphasized throughout that the doorkeeper apparently realizes nothing of all this. That

is not in itself remarkable, since according to this interpretation the doorkeeper is deceived in a much more important issue, affecting his very office. At the end, for example, he says

regarding the entrance to the Law: 'I am now going to shut it,' but at the beginning of the

story we are told that the door leading into the Law always stands open, and if it always

stands open, that is to say at all times, without reference to the life or death of the man,

then the doorkeeper cannot close it. There is some difference of opinion about the motive

behind the doorkeeper's statement, whether he said he was going to close the door merely

for the sake of giving an answer, or to emphasize his devotion to duty, or to bring the man

into a state of grief and regret in his last moments. But there is no lack of agreement that

the doorkeeper will not be able to shut the door. Many indeed profess to find that he is

subordinate to the man even in knowledge, toward the end, at least, for the man sees the

radiance that issues from the door of the Law while the doorkeeper in his official position

must stand with his back to the door, nor does he say anything to show that he has

perceived the change." "That is well argued," said K., after repeating to himself in a low

voice several passages from the priest's exposition. "It is well argued, and I am inclined to

agree that the doorkeeper is deceived. But that has not made me abandon my former

opinion, since both conclusions are to some extent compatible. Whether the doorkeeper is

clear-sighted or deceived does not dispose of the matter. I said the man is deceived. If the

doorkeeper is clear-sighted, one might have doubts about that, but if the doorkeeper

himself is deceived, then his deception must of necessity be communicated to the man.

That makes the doorkeeper not, indeed, a deceiver, but a creature so simple-minded that he

ought to be dismissed at once from his office. You mustn't forget that the doorkeeper's

deceptions do himself no harm but do infinite harm to the man." "There are objections to

that," said the priest. "Many aver that the story confers no right on anyone to pass

judgment on the doorkeeper. Whatever he may seem to us, he is yet a servant of the Law;

that is, he belongs to the Law and as such is beyond human judgment. In that case one

must not believe that the doorkeeper is subordinate to the man. Bound as he is by his

service, even only at the door of the Law, he is incomparably greater than anyone at large

in the world. The man is only seeking the Law, the doorkeeper is already attached to it. It

is the Law that has placed him at his post; to doubt his dignity is to doubt the Law itself."

"I don't agree with that point of view," said K., shaking his head, "for if one accepts it, one

must accept as true everything the doorkeeper says. But you yourself have sufficiently

proved how impossible it is to do that." "No," said the priest, "it is not necessary to accept

everything as true, one must only accept it as necessary." "A melancholy conclusion," said

K. "It turns lying into a universal principle." \*

K. said that with finality, but it was not his final judgment. He was too tired to survey

all the conclusions arising from the story, and the trains of thought into which it was

leading him were unfamiliar, dealing with impalpabilities better suited to a theme for

discussion among Court officials than for him. The simple story had lost its clear outline,

he wanted to put it out of his mind, and the priest, who now showed great delicacy of

feeling, suffered him to do so and accepted his comment in silence, although undoubtedly

he did not agree with it. They paced up and down for a while in silence, K. walking close beside the priest,

ignorant of his whereabouts. The lamp in his hand had long since gone out. The silver

image of some saint once glimmered into sight immediately before him, by the sheen of its

own silver, and was instantaneously lost in the darkness again. To keep himself from being

utterly dependent on the priest, K. asked: "Aren't we near the main doorway now?" "No,"

said the priest, "we're a long way from it. Do you want to leave already?" Although at that

moment K. had not been thinking of leaving, he answered at once: "Of course, I must go.

I'm the Chief Clerk of a Bank, they're waiting for me, I only came here to show a business

friend from abroad round the Cathedral." "Well," said the priest, reaching out his hand to

K., "then go." "But I can't find my way alone in this darkness," said K. "Turn left to the

wall," said the priest, "then follow the wall without leaving it and you'll come to a door."

The priest had already taken a step or two away from him, but K. cried out in a loud voice,

"Please wait a moment." "I am waiting," said the priest. "Don't you want anything more

from me?" asked K. "No," said the priest. "You were so friendly to me for a time," said K.,

"and explained so much to me, and now you let me go as if you cared nothing about me."

"But you have to leave now," said the priest. "Well, yes," said K., "you must see that I can't

help it." "You must first see who I am," said the priest. "You are the prison chaplain," said

K., groping his way nearer to the priest again; his immediate return to the Bank was not so

necessary as he had made out, he could quite well stay longer. "That means I belong to the

Court," said the priest. "So why should I want anything from you? The Court wants

nothing from you. It receives you when you come and it dismisses you when you go." Chapter 10

The End

ON THE evening before K.'s thirty-first birthday -- it was about nine o'clock, the time

when a hush falls on the streets -- two men came to his lodging. In frock coats, pallid and

plump, with top hats that were apparently irremovable. After some exchange of formalities

regarding precedence at the front door, they repeated the same ceremony more elaborately

before K.'s door. Without having been informed of their visit, K. was sitting also dressed in

black in an armchair near the door, slowly pulling on a pair of new gloves that fitted tightly

over the fingers, looking as if he were expecting guests. He stood up at once and

scrutinized the gentlemen with curiosity. "So you are meant for me?" he asked. The

gentlemen bowed, each indicating the other with the hand that held the top hat. K. admitted

to himself that he had been expecting different visitors. He went to the window and took

another look at the dark street. Nearly all the windows at the other side of the street were

also in darkness; in many of them the curtains were drawn. At one lighted tenement

window some babies were playing behind bars, reaching with their little hands toward each

other although not able to move themselves from the spot. "Tenth-rate old actors they send



for me," said K. to himself, glancing round again to confirm the impression.  
"They want to

finish me off cheaply." He turned abruptly toward the men and asked:  
"What theater are

you playing at?" "Theater?" said one, the corners of his mouth twitching as  
he looked for

advice to the other, who acted as if he were a dumb man struggling to  
overcome a stubborn

disability. "They're not prepared to answer questions," said K. to himself  
and went to fetch

his hat. While still on the stairs the two of them tried to take K. by the arms,  
and he said:

"Wait till we're in the street, I'm not an invalid." But just outside the street  
door they

fastened on him in a fashion he had never before experienced. They kept  
their shoulders

close behind his and instead of crooking their elbows, wound their arms  
round his at full

length, holding his hands in a methodical, practiced, irresistible grip. K.  
walked rigidly

between them, the three of them were interlocked in a unity which would  
have brought all

three down together had one of them been knocked over. It was a unity such  
as can hardly

be formed except by lifeless matter.

Under the street lamps K. attempted time and time again, difficult though it was at

such very close quarters, to see his companions more clearly than had been possible in the

dusk of his room. "Perhaps they are tenors," he thought, as he studied their fat double

chins. He was repelled by the painful cleanliness of their faces. One could literally see that

the cleansing hand had been at work in the corners of the eyes, rubbing the upper lip,

scrubbing out the furrows at the chin. \*

When that occurred to K. he halted, and in consequence the others halted too; they

stood on the verge of an open, deserted square adorned with flower beds. "Why did they send you, of all people!" he said; it was more a cry than a question. The gentlemen

obviously had no answer to make, they stood waiting with their free arms hanging, like

sickroom attendants waiting while their patient takes a rest. "I won't go any farther," said

K. experimentally. No answer was needed to that, it was sufficient that the two men did

not loosen their grip and tried to propel K. from the spot; but he resisted them. "I shan't

need my strength much longer, I'll expend all the strength I have," he thought. Into his

mind came a recollection of flies struggling away from the flypaper till their little legs

were torn off. "The gentlemen won't find it easy."

And then before them Fräulein Bürstner appeared, mounting a small flight of steps

leading into the square from a low-lying side-street. It was not quite certain that it was she,

but the resemblance was close enough. Whether it were really Fräulein Bürstner or not,

however, did not matter to K.; the important thing was that he suddenly realized the futility

of resistance. There would be nothing heroic in it were he to resist, to make difficulties for

his companions, to snatch at the last appearance of life by struggling. He set himself in

motion, and the relief his warders felt was transmitted to some extent even to himself.

They suffered him now to lead the way, and he followed the direction taken by the girl

ahead of him, not that he wanted to overtake her or to keep her in sight as long as possible,

but only that he might not forget the lesson she had brought into his mind. "The only thing

I can do now," he told himself, and the regular correspondence between his steps and the

steps of the other two confirmed his thought, "the only thing for me to go on doing is to

keep my intelligence calm and analytical to the end. I always wanted to snatch at the world

with twenty hands, and not for a very laudable motive, either. That was wrong, and am I to

show now that not even a year's trial has taught me anything? Am I to leave this world as a

man who has no common sense? Are people to say of me after I am gone that at the

beginning of my case I wanted to finish it, and at the end of it I wanted to begin it again? I

don't want that to be said. I am grateful for the fact that these half-dumb, senseless

creatures have been sent to accompany me on this journey, and that I have been left to say

to myself all that is needed."

Fräulein Bürstner meanwhile had gone round the bend into a side-street, but by this

time K. could do without her and submitted himself to the guidance of his escort. In

complete harmony all three now made their way across a bridge in the moonlight, the two

men readily yielded to K.'s slightest movement, and when he turned slightly toward the

parapet they turned, too, in a solid front. The water, glittering and trembling in the

moonlight, divided on either side of a small island, on which the foliage of trees and

bushes rose in thick masses, as if bunched together. Beneath the trees ran gravel paths,

now invisible, with convenient benches on which K. had stretched himself at ease many a

summer. "I didn't mean to stop," he said to his companions, shamed by their obliging

compliance. Behind K.'s back the one seemed to reproach the other gently for the mistaken

stop they had made, and then all three went on again. \* They passed through several steeply rising streets, in which policemen stood or

patrolled at intervals; sometimes a good way off, sometimes quite near. One with a bushy

mustache, his hand on the hilt of his saber, came up as of set purpose close to the not quite

harmless-looking group. The two gentlemen halted, the policeman seemed to be already

opening his mouth, but K. forcibly pulled his companions forward. He kept looking round

cautiously to see if the policeman were following; as soon as he had put a corner between

himself and the policeman he started to run, and his two companions, scant of breath as

they were, had to run beside him.

So they came quickly out of the town, which at this point merged almost without

transition into the open fields. A small stone quarry, deserted and desolate, lay quite near

to a still completely urban house. Here the two men came to a standstill, whether because

this place had been their goal from the very beginning or because they were too exhausted

to go farther. Now they loosened their hold of K., who stood waiting dumbly, took off the

top hats and wiped the sweat from their brows with pocket handkerchiefs, meanwhile

surveying the quarry. The moon shone down on everything with that simplicity and

serenity which no other light possesses. a After an exchange of courteous formalities

regarding which of them was to take precedence in the next task -- these emissaries

seemed to have been given no specific assignments in the charge laid jointly upon them --

one of them came up to K. and removed his coat, his waistcoat, I and finally his shirt. K.

shivered involuntarily, whereupon the man gave him a light, reassuring pat on the back.

Then he folded the clothes carefully together, as if they were likely to be used again at

some time, although perhaps not immediately. Not to leave K. standing motionless,

exposed to the night breeze, which was rather chilly, he took him by the arm and walked

him up and down a little, while his partner investigated the quarry to find a suitable spot.

When he had found it he beckoned, and K.'s companion led him over there. It was a spot

near the cliffside where a loose boulder was lying. The two of them laid K. down on the

ground, propped him against the boulder, and settled his head upon it. But in spite of the

pains they took and all the willingness K. showed, his posture remained contorted and

unnatural-looking. So one of the men begged the other to let him dispose K. all by himself,

yet even that did not improve matters. Finally they left K. in a position which was not even

the best of the positions they had already tried out. Then one of them opened his frock coat

and out of a sheath that hung from a belt girt round his waistcoat drew a long, thin, doubleedged

butcher's knife, held it up, and tested the cutting edges in the moonlight. Once more

the odious courtesies began, the first handed the knife across K. to the second, who handed

it across K. back again to the first. K. now perceived clearly that he was supposed to seize

the knife himself, as it traveled from hand to hand above him, and plunge it into his own

breast. But he did not do so, he merely turned his head, which was still free to move, and

gazed around him. He could not completely rise to the occasion, he could not relieve the

officials of all their tasks; the responsibility for this last failure of his lay with him who had

not left him the remnant of strength necessary for the deed. His glance fell on the top story

of the house adjoining the quarry. With a flicker as of a light going up, the casements of a

window there suddenly flew open; a human figure, faint and insubstantial at that distance and that height, leaned abruptly far forward and stretched both arms still farther. Who was

it? A friend? A good man? Someone who sympathized? Someone who wanted to help?

Was it one person only? Or was it mankind? Was help at hand? Were there arguments in

his favor that had been overlooked? Of course there must be. Logic is doubtless

unshakable, but it cannot withstand a man who wants to go on living. Where was the Judge



whom he had never seen? Where was the High Court, to which he had never penetrated?

He raised his hands and spread out all his fingers. \*

But the hands of one of the partners were already at K.'s throat, while the other thrust

the knife deep into his heart and turned it there twice. With failing eyes K. could still see

the two of them immediately before him, cheek leaning against cheek, watching the final

act. "Like a dog!" he said; it was as if the shame of it must outlive him.

end

## POSTSCRIPT TO THE FIRST EDITION

(1925)

ALL Franz Kafka's utterances about life were profound and original, and so too was his

attitude toward his own work and to the question of publication altogether. It would be

impossible to overrate the gravity of the problems with which he wrestled in this

connection, and which for that reason must serve as a guide for any publication of his

posthumous works. The following indications may help to give at least an approximate

idea of his attitude.

I wrested from Kafka nearly everything he published either by persuasion or by guile.

This is not inconsistent with the fact that he frequently during long periods of his life

experienced great happiness in writing, although he never dignified it by any other name

than "scribbling." Anyone who was ever privileged to hear him read his own prose out

loud to a small circle of intimates with an intoxicating fervor and a rhythmic verve beyond

any actor's power, was made directly aware of the genuine irrepressible joy in creation and

of the passion behind his work.

If he nevertheless repudiated it, this was firstly because certain unhappy experiences had

driven him in the direction of a kind of self-sabotage and therefore also toward nihilism as

far as his own work was concerned; but also independently of that because, admittedly

without ever saying so, he applied the highest religious standard to his art; and since this

was wrung from manifold doubts and difficulties, that standard was too high. It was

probably immaterial to him that his work might nevertheless greatly help many others who

were striving after faith, nature, and wholeness of soul; for in his inexorable search for his

own salvation, his first need was to counsel, not others, but himself.

That is how I personally interpret Kafka's negative attitude toward his own work. He

often spoke of "false hands" beckoning to him while he was writing; and he also

maintained that what he had already written, let alone published, interfered with his further

work. There were many obstacles to be overcome before a volume of his saw the light of

day. All the same, the sight of the books in print gave him real pleasure, and occasionally,

too, the impression they made. In fact there were times when he surveyed both himself and

his works with a more benevolent eye, never quite without irony, but with friendly irony;

with an irony which concealed the infinite pathos of a man who admitted of no

compromise in his striving for perfection.

No will was found among Kafka's literary remains. In his desk among a mass of

papers lay a folded note written in ink and addressed to me. This is how it runs:

DEAREST MAX, my last request: Everything I leave behind me (in my bookcase, linen-cupboard, and my desk) both at home and in the office,

or anywhere else where anything may have got to and meets your eye), in the way of diaries, manuscripts, letters (my own and others'), sketches, and so on, to be burned unread; also all writings and sketches which you or others may possess; and ask those others for them in my name. Letters which they do not want to hand over to you, they should at least promise faithfully to burn themselves.

Yours,

FRANZ KAFKA

A closer search produced an obviously earlier note written in pencil on yellowed paper,

which said:

DEAR MAX, perhaps this time I shan't recover after all. Pneumonia after a whole month's pulmonary fever is all too likely; and not even writing this down can avert it, although there is a certain power in that.

For this eventuality therefore, here is my last will concerning everything I have written:

Of all my writings the only books that can stand are these: The Judgment, The Stoker, Metamorphosis, Penal Colony, Country Doctor and the short story: Hunger-Artist. (The few copies of Meditation can remain. I do not want to give anyone the trouble of pulping them; but nothing in that volume must be printed again.) When I say that those five books and the

short story can stand, I do not mean that I wish them to be reprinted and handed down to posterity. On the contrary, should they disappear altogether that would please me best. Only, since they do exist, I do not wish to hinder anyone who may want to, from keeping them.

But everything else of mine which is extant (whether in journals, in manuscript, or letters), everything without exception in so far as it is discoverable or obtain- able from the addressees by request (you know most of them yourself; it is chiefly . . . and whatever happens don't forget the couple of notebooks in . . .'s possession) -- all these things, without exception and preferably unread (I won't absolutely forbid you to look at them, though I'd far rather you didn't and in any case no one else is to do so) -

- all these things without exception are to be burned, and I beg you to do this

as soon as possible.

FRANZ

If, in spite of these categorical instructions, I nevertheless refuse to perform the holocaust demanded of me by my friend, I have good and sufficient reasons for that.

Some of them do not admit of public discussion; but in my opinion those which I can

communicate are themselves amply sufficient to explain my decision.

The chief reason is this: when in 1921 I embarked on a new profession, I told Kafka

that I had made my will in which I had asked him to destroy this and that, to look through

some other things, and so forth. Kafka thereupon showed me the outside of the note

written in ink which was late: found in his desk, and said: "My last testament will be quite

simple -- a request to you to burn everything." I can still remember the exact wording of

the answer I gave him: "If you seriously think me capable of such a thing, let me tell you

here and now that I shall not carry out your wishes." The whole conversation was

conducted in the jesting tone we generally used together, but with the underlying

seriousness which each of us always took for granted in the other. Convinced as he was

that I meant what I said, Franz should have appointed another executor if he had been

absolutely and finally determined that his instructions should stand.

I am far from grateful to him for having precipitated me into this difficult conflict of

conscience, which he must have foreseen, for he knew with what fanatical veneration I

listened to his every word. Among other things, this was the reason why, during the whole

twenty-two years of our unclouded friendship, I never once threw away the smallest scrap

of paper that came from him, no, not even a post card. Nor would I wish the words "I am

far from grateful" to be misunderstood. What does a conflict of conscience, be it never so

acute, signify when weighed in the balance against the inestimable blessing I owe to his

friendship which has been the mainstay of my whole existence!

Other reasons are: the instructions in the penciled note were not followed by Franz

himself; for later he gave the explicit permission to reprint parts of Meditation in a journal;

and he also agreed to the publication of three further short stories which he himself

brought out, together with Hunger-Artist, with the firm Die Schmiede. Besides, both sets

of instructions to me were the product of a period when Kafka's self-critical tendency was

at its height. But during the last year of his life his whole existence took an unforeseen turn

for the better, a new, happy, and positive turn which did away with his self-hatred and

nihilism. Then, too, my decision to publish his posthumous work is made easier by the

memory of all the embittered struggles preceding every single publication of Kafka's

which I extorted from him by force and often by begging. And yet afterwards he was

reconciled with these publications and relatively satisfied with them. Finally in a

posthumous publication a whole series of objections no longer applies; as, for instance,

that present publication might hinder future work and recall the dark shadows of personal

grief and pain. How closely non-publication was bound up for Kafka with the problem of

how to conduct his life (a problem which, to our immeasurable grief, no longer obtains)

could be gathered from many of his conversations and can be seen in this letter to me:

. . . I am not enclosing the novels. Why rake up old efforts? Only

because I have not burned them yet? . . . Next time I come I hope to do so.

Where is the sense in keeping such work which is "even" bungled from the

aesthetic point of view? Surely not in the hope of piecing a whole together from all these fragments, some kind of justification for my existence,

something to cling to in an hour of need? But that, I know, is impossible;

there is no help for me there. So what shall I do with the things? Since they



can't help me, am I to let them harm me, as must be the case, given my knowledge about them?

I am well aware that something remains which would prohibit publication to those of

outstandingly delicate feelings. But I believe it to be my duty to resist the very insidious

lure of such scruples. My decision does not rest on any of the reasons given above but

simply and solely on the fact that Kafka's unpublished work contains the most wonderful

treasures, and, measured against his own work, the best things he has written. In all

honesty I must confess that this one fact of the literary and ethical value of what I am

publishing would have been enough to decide me to do so, definitely, finally, and

irresistibly, even if I had had no single objection to raise against the validity of Kafka's last

wishes.

Unhappily Kafka performed the function of his own executor on part of his literary

estate. In his lodgings I found ten large quarto notebooks -- only the covers remained; their

contents had been completely destroyed. In addition to this he had, according to reliable

testimony, burned several writing pads. I only found one file in his lodgings (about a

hundred aphorisms on religious subjects), an autobiographical sketch which must remain

unpublished for the moment, and a pile of papers which I am now putting in order. I hope

that among them several finished or almost finished short stories may be found. I was also

entrusted with an incompleting beast-tale and a sketchbook.

The most valuable part of the legacy consists in those works which were removed

before the author's grim intentions could be fulfilled and conveyed to a place of safety.

These are three novels. "The Stoker," a story already published, forms the first chapter of a

novel whose scene is laid in America; and, as the concluding chapter is extant, there is

probably no essential gap in the story. This novel is in the keeping of a woman-friend of

the author. I obtained possession of the two others, The Trial and The Castle, in 1920 and

1923; and this is a great consolation to me now. For these works will reveal the fact that

Kafka's real significance, which has been thought until now with some reason to lie in his

specialized mastery of the short story, is in reality that of a great epic writer.

These works will probably fill about four volumes of the posthumous edition; but

they are far indeed from rendering the whole magic of Kafka's personality. The time has

not yet come for the publication of his letters, each single one of which shows the same

truth to nature and intensity of feeling as his literary work; but meanwhile a small circle of

Kafka's friends will see to it that all the utterances of this incomparable human being

which remain in their memory shall be collected forthwith. To give onh' one instance: how

many of the works which, to my bitter disappointment, were not to be found in his

lodgings, were read out to me by my friend, or read at least in part, and their plots sketched

in part. And what unforgettable, entirely original, and profound thoughts lie communicated

to me! As far as my memory and my strength permit, nothing of all this shall be lost. I took the manuscript of *The Trial* into my keeping in June 1920 and immediately put

it in order. The manuscript has no title; but Kafka always called it *The Trial* in

conversation. The division into chapters as well as the chapter headings are his work; but I

had to rely on my own judgment for the order of the chapters. However, as my friend had

read a great part of the novel to me, memory came to the aid of judgment. Franz regarded

the novel as unfinished. Before the final chapter given here a few more stages of the

mysterious trial were to have been described. But as the trial, according to the author's own

statement made by word of mouth, was never to get as far as the highest Court, in a certain

sense the novel could never be terminated -- that is to say, it could be prolonged into

infinity. At all events, the completed chapters taken in conjunction with the final chapter

which rounds them off, reveal both the meaning and the form with the most convincing

clarity; and anyone ignorant of the fact that the author himself intended to go on working

at it (he omitted to do so because his life entered another phase) would hardly be aware of

gaps. My work on the great bundle of papers which at that time represented this novel was

confined to separating the finished from the unfinished chapters. I am reserving the latter

for the final volume of the posthumous edition; they contain nothing essential to the

development of the action. One of these fragments, under the title "A Dream," was

included by the author himself in the volume called A Country Doctor. The completed

chapters have been united here and arranged in order. Only one of the unfinished chapters,

which was obviously very nearly complete, has been inserted as Chapter viii with a slight

transposition of four lines. I have of course altered nothing in the text. I have only

expanded the numerous contractions (for instance, "Fräulein Bürstner" for "F. B." and

"Titorelli" for "T."), and I have corrected a few little slips which had obviously only been

left in the manuscript because the author had never subjected it to a final revision.

Max Brod

The interrogation seems to be limited to looks, thought K.; well, I'll give him a few minutes' grace. I wish

I knew what kind of an official body it can be which goes in for such elaborate arrangements in a case

like mine which, from the official point of view, offers no prospects of any kind. For elaborate is the only

word to use for this whole setup. Three people already wasted on me, two rooms not belonging to me

disarranged, and over there in the corner another three young men are standing and looking at Fräulein

Bürstner's photographs.

BACK

As someone said to me -- I can't remember now who it was -- it is really remarkable that when you wake

up in the morning you nearly always find everything in exactly the same place as the evening before. For

when asleep and dreaming you are, apparently at least, in an essentially different state from that of

wakefulness; and therefore, as that man truly said, it requires enormous presence of mind or rather

quickness of wit, when opening your eyes to seize hold as it were of everything in the room at exactly the

same place where you had let it go on the previous evening. That was why, he said, the moment of

waking up was the riskiest moment of the day. Once that was well over without deflecting you from your

orbit, you could take heart of grace for the rest of the day.

BACK

As you know, employees always know more than their employers.

BACK

The thought that by doing this he was perhaps making it easier for them to keep his own person under

observation, which they had possibly been instructed to do, seemed to him such a ludicrous notion, that

he buried his head in his hands and remained like that for several minutes in order to come to his senses.

"A few more ideas like that," he said to himself, "and you really will go mad." Then he raised his rather

grating voice all the louder.

BACK

A soldier was doing sentry duty up and down before the house. So now they had even put a watch on the

house. K. had to lean out very far to see him, for he was walking close to the wall. "Hallo !" he called out

to him, but not loud enough for the man to hear. However it soon became apparent that he was only

waiting for a servant girl who had gone across the road to a public house to fetch some beer, for she now

appeared in the lighted doorway. K. asked himself if he had believed even for a moment that the sentry

had been meant for him. He could not answer the question.

BACK

"What a tiresome person you are; it's impossible to tell whether you are serious or not." "There's

something in that," said K., delighted to be chatting with a pretty girl; "there's something in that. I am

never serious, and therefore I have to make jokes do duty both for jest and earnest. But I was arrested in

earnest."

BACK

Instead of "local political meeting," "Socialist meeting" was originally used.

BACK

All K. could see was that her blouse was unbuttoned and hanging round her waist, that a man had

dragged her into a corner and was pressing her body to his, she being bare from the waist up except for

her vest.

BACK

K. had just been going to catch hold of the woman's hand which she was obviously if timorously

stretching out to him, when the student's words caught his attention. He was a voluble, overbearing

young man, so that perhaps it would be possible to get more precise information from him about the

charges brought against K. And if only K. had this information then undoubtedly he could put a stop to

the whole proceedings immediately with one wave of his hand to everyone's dismay.

BACK

Yes, it was even certain that he would also have rejected this proposal even if it had been combined with

bribery, which would probably have offended him still more. For, as long as his case was pending, K.'s

person must surely be inviolable to all the officials connected with the case.



BACK

Even this praise left the girl unmoved, nor did it seem to make any real impression on her when K.'s

uncle replied: "Maybe. All the same I'll send a nurse round to you, if possible today. If she does not

prove satisfactory, you can always dismiss her; but give her trial to please me. These surroundings and

the oppressive silence you are living in are enough to finish anyone off." "It's not always so quiet here,"

said the lawyer; "I'll only agree to that hospital nurse if I must." "You must," said K.'s uncle.

BACK

The desk, which took up almost the whole length of the room, stood near the windows and was placed in

such a way that the lawyer had his back to the door, so that a visitor was obliged to cross the whole width

of the room like the veriest intruder before he could see the lawyer's face, unless indeed the latter were

kind enough to turn round toward him.

BACK

No, K. had nothing whatsoever to hope for if his trial became common knowledge. Anyone who did not

rise up as a judge to condemn him out of hand would certainly try to humiliate him at the very least, that

being now such an easy thing to do.

BACK

It was quite dark in the room; there were probably heavy stuff curtains at the windows which allowed no

shimmer of light to shine through. Slightly stimulated because he had been running, K. automatically

took several long strides. Then he came to a halt and realized that he had no idea which part of the room

he was in. The lawyer was obviously asleep and his breathing was inaudible because it was his habit to

creep right under the feather quilt.

BACK

. . . as if he were waiting for a sign of life from the accused. . .

BACK

"You are not speaking frankly to me, and you never have spoken frankly to me. So that if, at least in your

own opinion, you are being misjudged, you have only yourself to blame. I am not afraid of being

misjudged, because I am being frank with you. You have pounced upon my case as if I were quite free;

and it almost seems to me now as if you had not only conducted it badly, but as if, omitting to take any

serious steps, you had also tried to conceal the state of the case from me, thus obstructing any

intervention on my part, so that one day, somewhere, in my absence, judgment will be pronounced. I do

not say that you meant to do all that. . .

BACK

It would have been very tempting now to laugh at Block. Leni took advantage of K.'s absent-mindedness

and, since he was holding her hands, she rested her elbows on the back of his armchair and began to rock

it gently. At first K. paid no attention to this, but watched Block cautiously lifting up the feather quilt,

obviously in order to find the lawyer's hands, which he wished to kiss.

BACK

. . . if one did not know what he was talking about, one would have taken it, at first sight at least, to be

the falling of water into the basin of a fountain.

BACK

When he had said that, he faltered. It came home to him that he had been talking about a legend and

judging it and yet that he knew nothing whatsoever about its source of origin and that he was equally in

the dark about the interpretations. He had been drawn into a train of thought which was totally foreign to

him. So after all this priest was like all the others? Only willing to speak about K.'s case allusively, in

order to mislead him perhaps and finally fall silent? Revolving these thoughts, K. had neglected the

lamp, which began to smoke, although he only noticed this when the smoke was eddying round his chin.

Then he tried to turn the lamp down and it went out. He stood still. It was quite dark and he had no idea

which part of the church he was in. As there was no sound anywhere near him either, he asked: "Where

are you ?" "Here," said the priest and took his hand. "Why did you let the lamp go out? Come with me

and I'll take you to the vestry where there is a light."

K. was glad enough to be able to leave the Cathedral proper. The height and breadth of the space

around him oppressed him, impenetrable as it was to his gaze except for a tiny circumference. More than

once, although well aware of the futility of doing so, he had looked up, and darkness, nothing but

darkness, had literally flown toward him from all sides. Led by the priest, he hastened after him.

A lamp was burning in the vestry, a still smaller lamp than the one K. was carrying; and it hung

down so low that it hardly illuminated anything but the floor of the vestry which, though narrow, was

probably as lofty as the Cathedral itself. "It's so dark everywhere," said K. and put his hand over his eyes

as if they were aching from the strain of finding his way about.

BACK

Their eyebrows looked as if they had been stuck on to their foreheads, and they danced up and down

independently of the movements made in walking.

BACK

They went along several paths mounting upward. There were policemen about here and there, either

standing or strolling, sometimes in the distance, sometimes very near. One of them with a bushy

mustache, his hand on the hilt of the saber entrusted to him by the state, strode up, purposefully it

seemed, toward the rather suspect-looking group. "The state is offering to come to my assistance,"

whispered K. into the ear of one of the men. "What if I transferred the trial into the domain where the

writ of the state law runs? The outcome might very well be that I would have to defend you two

gentlemen against the state !"

BACK

ORIGINAL VERSION OF THE LAST SENTENCES IN THE  
PENULTIMATE PARAGRAPH.

. . . were there arguments in his favor that had been overlooked? Of course there must be. Logic is

doubtless unshakable, but it cannot withstand a man who wants to go on living. Where was the Judge?

Where the High Court of Justice? I have something to say. I lift up my hands.

BACK