

Franz Kafka

The Metamorphosis, A Hunger Artist,
In the Penal Colony,
and Other Stories



Translated by Ian Johnston

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Table of Contents

Before the Law	5
Up in the Gallery	7
An Imperial Message	8
Jackals and Arabs	9
The Judgment	13
The Hunter Gracchus	25
The Great Wall of China	30
A Country Doctor	43
A Report for an Academy	49
The Hunger Artist	59
In The Penal Colony	69
Metamorphosis	97
A Note on the Translator	148

Introductory Note

Franz Kafka (1883-1924) was born in Prague, now in the Czech Republic, but at that time part of the Austrian Empire (which became the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1867), to a middle-class Jewish, German-speaking family. For most of his working life he was employed as an insurance official. He published a number of stories in German, mainly in literary magazines and journals, but was little known during his lifetime. He instructed his literary executor to destroy all his manuscripts, a request which the executor refused to carry out.

Kafka was sick much of his life with various ailments, the most serious of which was tuberculosis, from which he died in 1924. He was buried in Prague. After his death, his reputation gradually improved, and Kafka is now recognized as one of the greatest writers of modernist European fiction.

Given the treatment of Kafka's manuscripts, some of the stories have complex editorial histories, and not all German versions of a particular story are exactly the same (e.g., "The Hunter Gracchus")

and “The Great Wall of China”). Hence, there may be some differences between these translations and others. The work of retrieving and editing Kafka’s manuscripts is a continuing project.

Before the Law¹

Before the law sits a gatekeeper. To this gatekeeper comes a man from the country who asks to gain entry into the law. But the gatekeeper says that he cannot grant him entry at the moment. The man thinks about it and then asks if he will be allowed to come in sometime later on. “It is possible,” says the gatekeeper, “but not now.” The gate to the law stands open, as always, and the gatekeeper walks to the side, so the man bends over in order to see through the gate into the inside. When the gatekeeper notices that, he laughs and says: “If it tempts you so much, try going inside in spite of my prohibition. But take note. I am powerful. And I am only the most lowly gatekeeper. But from room to room stand gatekeepers, each more powerful than the other. I cannot endure even one glimpse of the third.” The man from the country has not expected such difficulties: the law should always be accessible for everyone, he thinks, but as he now looks more closely at the gatekeeper in his fur coat, at his large pointed nose and his long, thin, black Tartar’s beard, he decides that it would be better to wait until he gets permission to go inside. The gatekeeper gives him a stool and allows him to sit down at the side in front of the gate. There he sits for days and years. He makes many attempts to be let in, and he wears the gatekeeper out with his requests. The gatekeeper often interrogates him briefly, questioning him about his homeland and many other things, but they are indifferent questions, the kind great men put, and at the end he always tells him once more that he cannot let him inside yet. The man, who has equipped himself with many things for his journey, spends everything, no matter how valuable, to win over the gatekeeper. The latter takes it all but, as he does so, says, “I am taking this only so that you do not think you have failed to do anything.” During the many years the man observes the gatekeeper almost continuously. He forgets the other gatekeepers, and this first one

¹ First published in “Selbstwehr,” September 1915. The story appears also in Kafka’s novel *The Trial*, which was not published until after his death.

seems to him the only obstacle for entry into the law. He curses the unlucky circumstance, in the first years thoughtlessly and out loud; later, as he grows old, he only mumbles to himself. He becomes childish and, since in the long years studying the gatekeeper he has also come to know the fleas in his fur collar, he even asks the fleas to help him persuade the gatekeeper. Finally his eyesight grows weak, and he does not know whether things are really darker around him or whether his eyes are merely deceiving him. But he recognizes now in the darkness an illumination which breaks inextinguishably out of the gateway to the law. Now he no longer has much time to live. Before his death he gathers in his head all his experiences of the entire time up into one question which he has not yet put to the gatekeeper. He waves to him, since he can no longer lift up his stiffening body. The gatekeeper has to bend way down to him, for the great difference has changed things considerably to the disadvantage of the man. "What do you still want to know now?" asks the gatekeeper. "You are insatiable." "Everyone strives after the law," says the man, "so how is that in these many years no one except me has requested entry?" The gatekeeper sees that the man is already dying and, in order to reach his diminishing sense of hearing, he shouts at him, "Here no one else can gain entry, since this entrance was assigned only to you. I'm going now to close it."

Up in the Gallery¹

If some frail tubercular lady circus rider were to be driven in circles around and around the arena for months and months without interruption in front of a tireless public on a swaying horse by a merciless whip-wielding master of ceremonies, spinning on the horse, throwing kisses and swaying at the waist, and if this performance, amid the incessant roar of the orchestra and the ventilators, were to continue into the ever-expanding, gray future, accompanied by applause, which died down and then swelled up again, from hands which were really steam hammers, perhaps then a young visitor to the gallery might rush down the long staircase through all the levels, burst into the ring, and cry "Stop!" through the fanfares of the constantly adjusting orchestra.

But since things are not like that—since a beautiful lady, in white and red, flies in through curtains which proud men in livery open in front of her, since the director, with the devotion of an animal seeks her eyes, breathes in her direction, and, as a precaution, lifts her up on the dapple-gray horse, as if she were his granddaughter, the one he loved more than anything else, as she starts a dangerous journey, but he cannot decide to give the signal with his whip and finally, controlling himself, gives it a crack, runs right beside the horse with his mouth open, follows the rider's leaps with a sharp gaze, hardly capable of comprehending her skill, tries to warn her by calling out in English, furiously castigating the grooms holding hoops, telling them to pay the most scrupulous attention, and begs the orchestra, with upraised arms, to be quiet before the great somersault, finally lifts the small woman down from the trembling horse, kisses her on both cheeks, and considers no public tribute adequate, while she herself, supported by him, high on the tips of her toes, with dust swirling around her, arms outstretched and little head thrown back, wants to share her luck with the entire circus—since this is how things are, the visitor to the gallery puts his face on the railing and, sinking into the final march as if into a difficult dream, weeps, without realizing it.

¹ First published in the collection of stories *A Country Doctor*, 1919.

An Imperial Message¹

The Emperor—so they say—has sent a message, directly from his death bed, to you alone, his pathetic subject, a tiny shadow which has taken refuge at the furthest distance from the imperial sun. He ordered the herald to kneel down beside his death bed and whispered the message to him. He thought it was so important that he had the herald repeat it back to him. He confirmed the accuracy of the verbal message by nodding his head. And in front of the entire crowd of those who have come to witness his death—all the obstructing walls have been broken down and all the great ones of his empire are standing in a circle on the broad and high soaring flights of stairs—in front of all of them he dispatched his herald. The messenger started off at once, a powerful, tireless man. Sticking one arm out and then another, he makes his way through the crowd. If he runs into resistance, he points to his breast where there is a sign of the sun. So he moves forward easily, unlike anyone else. But the crowd is so huge; its dwelling places are infinite. If there were an open field, how he would fly along, and soon you would hear the marvellous pounding of his fist on your door. But instead of that, how futile are all his efforts. He is still forcing his way through the private rooms of the innermost palace. He will never he win his way through. And if he did manage that, nothing would have been achieved. He would have to fight his way down the steps, and, if he managed to do that, nothing would have been achieved. He would have to stride through the courtyards, and after the courtyards the second palace encircling the first, and, then again, stairs and courtyards, and then, once again, a palace, and so on for thousands of years. And if he finally did burst through the outermost door—but that can never, never happen—the royal capital city, the centre of the world, is still there in front of him, piled high and full of sediment. No one pushes his way through here, certainly not with a message from a dead man. But you sit at your window and dream to yourself of that message when evening comes.

¹ First published in "Die Selbstwehr," September 1919. The story also is part of "The Great Wall of China" (see p. 30 below).

Jackals and Arabs¹

We were camping in the oasis. My companions were asleep. An Arab, tall and white, went past me. He had been tending to his camels and was going to his sleeping place.

I threw myself on my back into the grass. I wanted to sleep. I couldn't. The howling of a jackal in the distance—I sat up straight again. And what had been so far away was suddenly close by. A swarming pack of jackals around me, their eyes flashing dull gold and going out, slender bodies moving in a quick, coordinated manner, as if they were being controlled by a whip.

One of them came from behind, pushed himself under my arm, right against me, as if it needed my warmth, then stepped in front of me and spoke, almost eye to eye with me.

"I'm the oldest jackal for miles around. I'm happy I'm still able to welcome you here. I had already almost given up hope, for we've been waiting for you an infinitely long time. My mother waited, and her mother, and all her mothers, right back to the mother of all jackals. Believe me!"

"That surprises me," I said, forgetting to light the pile of wood which lay ready to keep the jackals away with its smoke, "I'm very surprised to hear that. I've come from the high north merely by chance and am in the middle of a short trip. What do you want then, Jackal?"

As if encouraged by this conversation, which was perhaps far too friendly, they drew their circle more closely around me, all panting and snarling.

"We know," the oldest began, "that you come from the north. Our hope rests on that very point. In the north there is a way of understanding things which one cannot find here among the Arabs. You know, from their cool arrogance one cannot strike a

¹ First published in "Der Jude," October 1917.

spark of common sense. They kill animals to eat them, and they disregard rotting carcasses.”

“Don’t speak so loud,” I said. “There are Arabs sleeping close by.”

“You really are a stranger,” said the jackal. “Otherwise you would know that throughout the history of the world a jackal has never yet feared an Arab. Should we fear them? Is it not misfortune enough that we have been cast out among such people?”

“Maybe. That could be,” I said. “I’m not up to judging things which are so far removed from me. It seems to be a very old conflict—it’s probably in the blood and so perhaps will only end with blood.”

“You are very clever” said the old jackal, and they all panted even more quickly, their lungs breathing rapidly, although they were standing still. A bitter smell streamed out of their open jaws—at times I could tolerate it only by clenching my teeth. “You are very clever. What you said corresponds to our ancient doctrine. So we take their blood, and the quarrel is over.”

“Oh!” I said, more sharply than I intended, “they’ll defend themselves. They’ll shoot you down in droves with their guns.”

“You do not understand us,” he said, “a characteristic of human beings which has not disappeared, not even in the high north. We are not going to kill them. The Nile would not have enough water to wash us clean. The mere sight of their living bodies makes us run away immediately into cleaner air, into the desert, which, for that very reason, is our home.”

All the jackals surrounding us—and in the meantime even more had come up from a distance—lowered their heads between the front legs and cleaned them with their paws. It was as if they wanted to conceal an aversion which was so terrible, that I would have much preferred to take a big jump and escape beyond their circle.

“So what do you intend to do,” I asked. I wanted to stand up, but I couldn’t. Two young animals were holding me firmly from behind with their jaws biting into my jacket and shirt. I had to remain sitting. “They are holding your train,” said the old jackal seriously, by way of explanation, “a mark of respect.” “They should let me

go," I cried out, turning back and forth between the old one and the young ones. "Of course, they will," said the old one, "if that's what you want. But it will take a little while, for, as is our habit, they have dug their teeth in deep and must first let their jaws open gradually. Meanwhile, listen to our request." "Your conduct has not made me particularly receptive to it," I said. "Don't make us pay for our clumsiness," he said, and now for the first time he brought the plaintive tone of his natural voice to his assistance. "We are poor animals—all we have is our teeth. For everything we want to do—good and bad—the only thing available to us is our teeth." "So what do you want?" I asked, only slightly reassured.

"Sir," he cried out, and all the jackals howled. To me it sounded very remotely like a melody. "Sir, you should end the quarrel which divides the world in two. Our ancestors described a man like you as the one who will do it. We must be free of the Arabs—with air we can breathe, a view of the horizon around us clear of Arabs, no cries of pain from a sheep which an Arab has knifed, and every animal should die peacefully and be left undisturbed for us to drain it empty and clean it right down to the bones. Cleanliness—that's what we want—nothing but cleanliness." Now they were all crying and sobbing. "How can you bear it in this world, you noble heart and sweet entrails? Dirt is their white; dirt is their black; their beards are horrible; looking at the corner of their eyes makes one spit; and if they lift their arms, hell opens up in their arm pits. And that's why, sir, that's why, my dear sir, with the help of your all-capable hands, with the help of your all-capable hands you must use these scissors to slit right through their throats." He jerked his head, and in response a jackal came up carrying on its canine tooth a small pair of sewing scissors covered with old rust.

"So finally the scissors—it's time to stop!" cried the Arab leader of our caravan, who had crept up on us from downwind. Now he swung his gigantic whip.

The jackals all fled quickly, but still remained at some distance huddled closely together, many animals so close and tense that it looked as if they were in a narrow pen with jack o' lanterns flying around them.

“So, you too, sir, have seen and heard this spectacle,” said the Arab, laughing as cheerfully as the reticence of his race permitted. “So you know what the animals want,” I asked. “Of course, sir,” he said. “That’s common knowledge—as long as there are Arabs, these scissiors wander through the deserts and will wander with us until the end of days. Every European is offered them for the great work; every European is exactly the one who seems to them qualified to do it. These animals have an absurd hope. They’re idiots, real idiots. That’s why we’re fond of them. They are our dogs, finer than the ones you have. Now, watch this. In the night a camel died. I have had it brought here.”

Four bearers came and threw the heavy carcass right in front of us. No sooner was it lying there than the jackals raised their voices. Every one of them crept forward, its body scraping the ground, as if drawn by an irresistible rope. They had forgotten the Arabs, forgotten their hatred. The presence of a powerfully stink-ing dead body wiped out everything and enchanted them. One of them was already hanging at the camel’s throat and with its first bite had found the artery. Like a small raging pump which—with a determination matched only by its hopelessness—seeks to put out an overpowering fire, every muscle of its body pulled and twitched in its place. Then right away all them were lying there on the corpse in a mountainous heap, working in the same way.

Then the leader cracked his sharp whip powerfully all around above them. They raised their heads, half fainting in their intoxicated state, looked at the Arab standing in front of them, started to feel the whip now hitting their muzzles, jumped away, and ran back a distance. But the camel’s blood was already lying there in pools, stinking to heaven, and the body was torn wide open in several places. They could not resist. They were there again. The leader once more raised his whip. I grabbed his arm. “Sir, you are right,” he said. “We’ll leave them to their calling. Besides, it’s time to break camp. You’ve seen them. Wonderful creatures, aren’t they? And how they hate us!”

The Judgment¹ for Miss Felice B.

It was a Sunday morning at the most beautiful time in spring. George Bendemann, a young merchant, was sitting in his private room on the first floor of one of the low, poorly constructed houses extending in a long row along the river, almost indistinguishable from each other except for their height and colour. He had just finished a letter to a friend from his youth who was now abroad, had sealed in a playful and desultory manner, and then was looking, elbows propped on the writing table, out of the window at the river, the bridge, and the hills on the other shore with their delicate greenery.

He was thinking about how this friend, dissatisfied with his progress at home, had actually run off to Russia some years before. Now he ran a business in St. Petersburg, which had gotten off to a very good start but which for a long time now had appeared to be faltering, as his friend complained on his increase-ingly rare visits. So he was wearing himself out working to no purpose in a foreign land. The exotic full beard only poorly concealed the face George had known so well since his childhood years, and the yellowish colour of his skin seemed to indicate a developing sickness. As he explained it, he had no real connection to the colony of his countrymen in the place and also hardly any social interaction with local families and so was resigning himself to being a permanent bachelor.

What should one write to such a man, who had obviously gone off course, a man one could feel sorry for but could not help. Should one perhaps advise him to come back home again, shift his life back here, take up again all the old friendly relationships—there was certainly nothing to prevent that—and in addition rely on the help of friends? But at the same time that amounted to saying to him—and the more gently one said it, the more wounding it would also be—that his previous attempts had been unsuccessful, that he should finally give them up, that he must come back and allow everyone to look at him as an eternal returned prodigal, that

¹ First published in "Arkadia" in 1913.

only his friends understood anything, and that he would be an over-age child, who should simply obey his successful friends who had stayed home. And then was it even certain that all the misery one would have to put him through had a point? Perhaps it would not even succeed in bringing him back home at all—in fact, he said himself that he no longer understood conditions in his homeland—so then he would remain in his foreign country in spite of everything, embittered by the advice and even a little more estranged from his friends. But if he really followed the advice and became depressed here—not intentionally, of course, but because of his circumstances—could not cope with life, with his friends or without them, felt ashamed, and had, in fact, no homeland and no friends any more, was it not much better for him to remain abroad, just as he was? Given these facts, could one think that he would really advance himself here?

For these reasons, if one still wanted to maintain some sort of relationship by correspondence, one could not provide any real news, the way one would without any inhibitions to the most casual acquaintance. It was already more than three years since his friend had been home, and he explained this with the very inadequate excuse of the uncertainty of the political conditions in Russia, which would not allow even the briefest absence of a small businessman, while it permitted hundreds of thousand of Russians to travel around peacefully in the world. But in the course of these three years much had changed for George. Since his mother's death, which had taken place about two years earlier, George had lived with his old father in a household they shared. His friend had naturally learned about it and had expressed his sympathy in a letter with such a dry tone that the reason could only have been that the sadness of such an event is completely inconceivable in a foreign country. But since that time George had tackled both his business dealings and everything else with greater determination. Perhaps while his mother was still alive, his father's unwillingness to accept any point of view in the business except his had prevented George from developing a real project of his own; perhaps his father, since his mother's death, had grown slacker, although he still worked all the time in the business; perhaps fortunate circumstances had played a much more important

role—something which was, in fact, highly likely—but in any case in these two years the business had developed very unexpectedly. They had had to double the staff, the cash turnover had increased fivefold, and there was no doubt that further progress lay ahead.

His friend, however, had no idea of these changes. Earlier, perhaps for the last time in that letter of condolence, he had wanted to persuade George to emigrate to Russia and had expanded upon the prospects which existed in St. Petersburg for George's particular line of business. The figures were minute compared to the scale which George's business had now acquired. But George had had no desire to write to his friend about his commercial success, and if he were to do it now belatedly, it would have looked really odd.

So George limited himself to writing to his friend only about insignificant details, the kind which pile up at random in one's memory when one is thinking things over on a peaceful Sunday. The only thing he wanted was to leave undisturbed the picture which his friend must have created of his home town during the long interval and which he would have learned to live with. And so it happened that George had announced three times to his friend in fairly widely spaced letters the engagement of an unimportant man to an equally unimportant young woman, until, quite contrary to George's intentions, the friend really began to get interested in this curious event.

But George preferred to write to him about such things rather than to confess that he himself had become engaged a month ago to a Miss Frieda Brandenfeld, a young woman from a prosperous family. He often spoke to his fiancée about this friend and about the unusual relationship he had with him in their correspondence. "Then there's no chance he'll be coming to our wedding," she said, "and yet I have the right to meet all your friends." "I don't want to upset him," George replied. "Don't misunderstand me. He would probably come, at least I think so, but he would feel compelled and hurt and would perhaps envy me—he'd certainly feel unhappy and incapable of ever coping with his unhappiness and would travel back alone. Alone—do you know what that means?" "Yes, but can't he find out about our wedding in some other way?"

“That’s true, but I can’t prevent that. However, given his lifestyle it’s unlikely.” “If you have friends like that, George, you shouldn’t have gotten engaged at all.” “Well, we’re both to blame for that, but now I wouldn’t want things to be any different.” And then when she, breathing rapidly under his kisses, kept insisting “Still, it truly does upset me,” he really thought it would be harmless to write everything to his friend. “That’s what I am, and that’s just how he’ll have to accept me,” he said to himself. “I can’t carve out of myself another man who might perhaps be more suitable for a friendship with him than I am.”

And, in fact, he did inform his friend about the engagement which had taken place in the long letter which he had written that Sunday morning, in the following words “The best piece of news I have saved until the end. I have become engaged to a Miss Frieda Brandefeld, a young woman from a well-to-do family, who first settled here long after your departure and whom you could thus hardly know. There will still be an opportunity to tell you more detailed information about my fiancée. Today it’s enough for you to know that I am truly fortunate and that, as far as our mutual relationship is concerned, the only thing that has changed is that in me you will now have, instead of a completely ordinary friend, a happy friend. Moreover, in my fiancée, who sends you her warm greetings and will soon write to you herself, you acquire a sincere female friend, something which is not entirely without significance for a bachelor. I know that there are many things hindering you from coming back to visit us, but wouldn’t my wedding be exactly the right opportunity to throw aside all obstacles for once? But whatever the case, do only what seems good to you, without concerning yourself about anything.”

George sat for a long time at his writing table with his letter in his hand, his face turned towards the window. He barely acknowledged with an absent-minded smile someone he knew who greeted him from the lane as he walked past.

Finally he put the letter in his pocket and went out of his room, angling across a small passageway into his father’s room, which he had not been in for months. There was really no need to do that, since he was always dealing with his father at work and they took

their noon meal at the same time in a restaurant. In the evenings, of course, they each did as they wished, but for the most part, unless George was with friends, as was most frequently the case, or was now visiting his fiancée, they still sat for a little while, each with his own newspaper, in the living room they shared.

George was surprised how dark his father's room was, even on this sunny morning. So that was the kind of shadow cast by the high wall which rose on the other side of the narrow courtyard. His father was sitting by the window in a corner decorated with various reminders of his late lamented mother and was reading a newspaper, which he held in front of his eyes to one side, attempting in this way to compensate for some weakness in his eyes. On the table stood the remains of his breakfast, not much of which appeared to have been eaten.

"Ah, George," said his father, coming up at once to meet him. His heavy night shirt opened up as he moved and the ends of it flapped around him. "My father is still a giant," said George to himself.

Then he spoke up: "It's unbearably dark in here."

"Yes, it certainly is dark," his father answered.

"And you've shut the window as well?"

"I prefer it that way."

"Well, it is quite warm outside," said George, as if continuing what he'd said earlier, and sat down.

His father cleared off the breakfast dishes and put them on a chest.

"I really only wanted to tell you," continued George, who was following the movements of the old man quite absent mindedly, "that I've now sent a report of my engagement to St. Petersburg." He pulled the letter a little way out of his pocket and let it drop back again.

"To St. Petersburg?" his father asked.

“To my friend,” said George, trying to look his father in the eye. “In business he’s completely different,” he thought. “How sturdily he sits here with his arms folded across his chest.”

“Ah yes, to your friend,” said his father, with emphasis.

“Well, father, you know at first I wanted to keep quiet to him about my engagement. Out of consideration, for no other reason. You yourself know he’s a difficult person. I said to myself he could well learn about my engagement from some other quarter, even if his solitary way of life makes that hardly likely—I can’t prevent that—but he should never learn about it from me personally.”

“And now you have been thinking about it differently?” the father asked. He set the large newspaper on the window sill and on top the newspaper his glasses, which he covered with his hand.

“Yes, now I’ve been reconsidering it. If he’s a good friend of mine, I said to myself, then a happy engagement for me is also something fortunate for him. And so I no longer hesitated to announce it to him. But before I send the letter, I wanted to tell you about it.”

“George,” said his father, pulling his toothless mouth wide open, “listen to me! You’ve come to me about this matter, to discuss it with me. No doubt that’s a credit to you. But it’s nothing, worse than nothing if you don’t now tell me the complete truth. I don’t want to stir up things which are not appropriate here. Since the death of our dear mother certain nasty things have been going on. Perhaps the time to talk about them has come and perhaps sooner than we think. In the business, a good deal escapes me. Perhaps it’s not hidden from me—at the moment I’m not claiming it’s done behind my back—I am no longer strong enough, my memory is deteriorating, I can’t keep an eye on so many things any more. First of all, that’s nature taking its course, and secondly the death of our dear mother was a much bigger blow to me than to you. But since we’re on the subject of this letter, I beg you, George, don’t deceive me. It’s a trivial thing, not worth mentioning. So don’t deceive me. Do you really have this friend in St. Petersburg?”

George stood up in embarrassment. “Let’s forget about my friend. A thousand friends wouldn’t replace my father for me. Do you know what I think? You’re not taking enough care of yourself. But

old age demands its due. You are indispensable to me in the business—you're very well aware of that—but if the business is going to threaten your health, I'll close it tomorrow for good. That won't happen. We must set up another life style for you. But something completely different. You sit here in the dark, and in the living room you'd have good light. You nibble at your breakfast instead of maintaining your strength properly. You sit by the closed window, and the air would do you so much good. No, my father! I'll bring in the doctor, and we'll follow his instructions. We'll change the room. You'll move into the front room. I'll come in here. For you there won't be any change. Everything will be moved over with you. But there's time for all that. Now I'll set you in bed for a little while. You need complete rest. Come, I'll help you get undressed. You'll see. I can do it. Or do you want to go into the front room right away. Then you can lie down in my bed for now. That would make a lot of sense."

George stood close beside his father, who had let his head with its tousled white hair sink onto his chest.

"George," said his father faintly, without moving.

George knelt down immediately alongside his father. He saw the enormous pupils in his father's tired face staring right at him from the corners of his eyes.

"You don't have a friend in St. Petersburg. You have always been a jokster and even with me you've not controlled yourself. So how could you have a friend there! I simply can't believe that."

"Think about it for a moment, father," said George. He raised his father from the arm chair and took off his nightgown as he just stood there very weakly. "It will soon be almost three years since my friend visited us. I still remember that you did not particularly like him. At least twice I kept him away from you, although he was sitting right in my room. It's true I could understand your aversion to him quite well. My friend does have his peculiarities. But then you later had a really good conversation with him yourself. At the time I was so proud of the fact that you listened to him, nodded your head, and asked questions. If you think about it, you must remember. That's when he told us incredible stories about the

Russian Revolution. For example, on a business trip in Kiev during a riot he saw a priest on a balcony who cut a wide bloody cross into the palm of his hand, raised his hand, and appealed to the mob. You've even repeated this story yourself now and then."

Meanwhile, George had succeeded in setting his father down again and carefully taking off the cotton trousers which he wore over his linen underwear, as well as his socks. Looking at the undergarments, which were not particularly clean, he reproached himself for having neglected his father. It certainly should have been his responsibility to look after his father's laundry. He had not yet talked explicitly with his fiancée about how they wished to make arrangements for his father's future, for they had tacitly assumed that his father would remain living alone in the old apartment. But now he quickly came to the firm decision to take his father with him into his future household. When one looked more closely, it almost seemed that the care which he was ready to provide for his father there could come too late.

He carried his father to bed in his arms. He experienced a dreadful feeling when he noticed, as he took a couple of paces to the bed, that his father was playing with the watch chain on his chest. He could not put him in the bed right away, so firm was his father's grip on this watch chain.

But as soon as he was in bed, all seemed well. He covered himself up and then even pulled the bedspread unusually high up over his shoulders. He look up at George in a not unfriendly manner.

"You do still remember him, don't you?" said George, nodding his head in encouragement.

"Am I well covered up now?" asked the father, as if he could not check whether his feet were sufficiently tucked in.

"So you feel good in bed now," said George and arranged the bedding better around him.

"Am I well covered up?" the father asked once more and seemed particularly keen to hear the answer.

"Just rest for now. You're well covered up."

“No!” cried his father, cutting short George’s answer to the question. He threw back the covers with such force that in an instant they had completely flown off, and he stood upright on the bed. He steadied himself with only one hand lightly touching the ceiling. “You wanted to cover me up—I know that, my little offspring—but I am not yet under the covers. And even if this is the last strength I have, it’s enough for you, too much for you. Yes, I do know your friend. He’d be a son after my own heart. That’s why you’ve been betraying him for years. Why else? Do you think I’ve not wept for him? That’s the reason you lock yourself in your office—no one should disturb you, the boss is busy—that’s the only way you can write your two-faced little letters to Russia. But fortunately no one has to teach a father to see through his son. Just now when you thought you’d brought him down, so far down that your buttocks could sit on him and he wouldn’t move, at that point my son the gentleman has decided to get married!”

George looked up at the frightening spectre of his father. The friend in St. Petersburg, whom the father suddenly knew so well, seized his imagination as never before. He saw him lost in the broad expanse of Russia. He saw him at the door of an empty, plundered business. Among the wreckage of his shelves, the shattered goods, the collapsed gas brackets, he was still standing, but only just. Why did he have to go so far away!

“But look at me,” cried his father, and George ran, almost distracted, to the bed to take everything in, but he faltered half way.

“Because she hoisted up her skirts,” the father began in an affected tone, “because she hoisted up her skirts like this, the repulsive goose,” and in order to imitate the action, he raised his shirt so high one could see the scar from his war years on his thigh, “because she hoisted her dress up like this and this, you chatted her up, and that’s how you could satisfy yourself with her without being disturbed—you’ve disgraced our mother’s memory, betrayed your friend, and stuck your father in bed, so he can’t move. But he can move, can’t he?”

And he stood completely unsupported and kicked his legs. He was radiant with insight.

George stood in a corner, as far away as possible from his father. A long time before he had firmly decided to observe everything closely, so he would not be surprised somehow by any devious attack, from behind or from above. Now he recalled again this long-forgotten decision and forgot it, like someone pulling a short thread through the eye of a needle.

“But now your friend hasn’t been betrayed at all,” cried the father—his forefinger, waving back and forth, emphasized the point. “I’ve been his on-the-spot representative here.”

“You comedian!” George could not resist calling out. He recognized immediately how damaging that was and bit down on his tongue, only too late—his eyes froze—until he doubled up with pain.

“Yes, naturally I’ve been playing a comedy! Comedy! A fine word! What other consolation remained for an old widowed father? Tell me—and while you’re answering still be my living son—what else was left to me in my back room, persecuted by a disloyal staff, old right down into to my bones? And my son goes merrily through the world, finishing off business deals which I had set up, falling over himself with delight, and walking away from your father with the tight-lipped face of an honourable gentleman! Do you think I didn’t love you, me, the one from whom you came?”

“Now he’ll bend forward,” thought George. “What if he falls and breaks apart!” These words hissed through his head.

His father leaned forward but did not fall over. When George did not come closer, as he had expected, he straightened himself up again.

“Stay where you are. I don’t need you! You think you still have the strength to come here and are holding yourself back only because that’s what you want. But what if you’re wrong! I am still much stronger than you. Perhaps all on my own I would have had to back off, but your mother gave me so much of her strength that I’ve established a splendid relationship with your friend and I have your customers here in my pocket!”

“He even has pockets in his shirt!” said George to himself and thought with this comment he could make his father look ridiculous to the whole world. He thought this for only a moment, because he constantly forgot everything.

“Just link arms with your fiancée and cross my path! I’ll sweep her right from your side—you have no idea how!”

George made a grimace, as if he didn’t believe that. The father merely nodded towards George’s corner, emphasizing the truth of what he’d said.

“How you amused me today when you came and asked whether you should write to your friend about the engagement. For he knows everything, you stupid boy, he knows everything! I’ve been writing to him, because you forgot to take my writing things away from me. That’s why he hasn’t come for years. He knows everything a hundred times better than you do yourself. He crumples up your letters unread in his left hand, while in his right hand he holds my letters up to read.”

In his enthusiasm he swung his arm over his head. “He knows everything a thousand times better,” he shouted.

“Ten thousand times!” said George, in order to make his father appear foolish, but in his mouth the phrase had already acquired the deathliest of tones.

“For years now I’ve been watching out for you to come with this question! Do you think I’m concerned about anything else? Do you think I read the newspapers? There!” and he threw a newspaper page which had somehow been carried into the bed right at George—an old newspaper, the name of which was completely unknown to George.

“How long you’ve waited before reaching maturity! Your mother had to die. She could not experience the joyous day. Your friend is deteriorating in his Russia—three years ago he was already yellow enough to be thrown away, and, as for me, well, you see how things are with me. You’ve got eyes for that!”

“So you’ve been lying in wait for me,” cried George.

In a pitying tone, his father said as an afterthought, "Presumably you wanted to say that earlier. But now it's totally irrelevant."

And in a louder voice : "So now you know what there was in the world outside of yourself. Up to this point you've known only about yourself! Essentially you've been an innocent child, but even more essentially you've been a devilish human being! And therefore understand this: I sentence you now to death by drowning!"

George felt himself hounded from the room. The crash with which his father fell onto the bed behind him he still carried in his ears as he left. On the staircase, where he raced down the steps as if it were an inclined plane, he surprised his cleaning woman, who was intending to tidy the apartment after the night before. "Jesus!" she cried and hid her face in her apron. But he was already past her. He leapt out the front door, driven across the roadway to the water. He was already clutching the railings the way a starving man grasps his food. He swung himself over, like the outstanding gymnast he had been in his youth, to his parents' pride. He was still holding on, his grip weakening, when between the railings he caught sight of a motor coach which would easily drown out the noise of his fall. He called out quietly, "Dear parents, I have always loved you nonetheless" and let himself drop.

At that moment an almost unending stream of traffic was going over the bridge.

The Hunter Gracchus¹

Two boys were sitting on the wall by the jetty playing dice. A man was reading a newspaper on the steps of a monument in the shadow of a hero wielding a sabre. A young girl was filling her tub with water at a fountain. A fruit seller was lying close to his produce and looking out to sea. Through the empty openings of the door and window of a bar two men could be seen drinking wine in the back. The landlord was sitting at a table in the front dozing. A small boat glided lightly into the small harbour, as if it were being carried over the water. A man in a blue jacket climbed out onto land and pulled the ropes through the rings. Behind the man from the boat, two other men in dark coats with silver buttons carried a bier, on which, under a large silk scarf with a floral pattern and fringe, a person was obviously lying. No one bothered with the newcomers on the jetty, even when they set the bier down to wait for their helmsman, who was still working with the ropes. No one came up to them, no one asked them any questions, no one took a closer look at them.

The helmsman was further held up a little by a woman with dishevelled hair, who now appeared on deck with a child at her breast. Then he moved on, pointing to a yellowish, two-story house which rose close by, directly on the left near the water. The bearers took up their load and carried it through the low door furnished with slender columns. A small boy opened a window, noticed immediately how the group was disappearing into the house, and quickly shut the window again. The door now closed, as well. It had been fashioned with care out of black oak wood. A flock of doves, which up to this point had been flying around the bell tower, came down in front of the house. The doves gathered before the door, as if their food was stored inside the house. One flew right up to the first floor and pecked at the window pane. They were brightly coloured, well cared for, lively animals. With a large sweep of her hand the woman threw some seeds towards them from the boat. They ate them up and then flew over to the woman.

¹ Written in 1917 but unpublished in Kafka's lifetime; first published in 1931 in the collection *Beim Bau der Chinesischen Mauer*.

A man in a top hat with a mourning ribbon came down one of the small, narrow, steeply descending lanes which led to the harbour. He looked around him attentively. Everything upset him. He winced at the sight of some garbage in a corner. There were fruit peels on the steps of the monument. As he went by, he pushed them off with his cane. He knocked on the door of the parlour, while at the same time taking off his top hat with his black-gloved right hand. It was opened immediately, and about fifty small boys, lined up in two rows in a long corridor, bowed to him.

The helmsman came down the stairs, welcomed the gentleman, and led him upstairs. On the first floor he accompanied him around the slight, delicately built balcony surrounding the courtyard, and, as the boys crowded behind them at a respectful distance, both men stepped into a large cool room at the back of the house. From it one could not see a facing house, only a bare gray-black rock wall. Those who had carried the bier were busy setting up and lighting some long candles at its head. But these provided no light. They only made the previously still shadows positively jump and flicker across the walls. The shawl was pulled back off the bier. On it lay a man with wildly unkempt hair and beard and a brown skin—he looked rather like a hunter. He lay there motionless, apparently without breathing, his eyes closed, although his surroundings were the only the only thing indicating that it could be a corpse.

The gentleman stepped over to the bier, laid a hand on the forehead of the man lying there, then knelt down and prayed. The helmsman gave a sign to the bearers to leave the room. They went out, drove away the boys who had gathered outside, and shut the door. The gentleman, however, was apparently still not satisfied with this stillness. He looked at the helmsman. The latter understood and went through a side door into the next room. The man on the bier immediately opened his eyes, turned his face with a painful smile towards the gentleman, and said, "Who are you?" Without any surprise, the gentleman got up from his kneeling position and answered, "The burgomaster of Riva." The man on the bier nodded, pointed to a chair by stretching his arm out feebly, and then, after the burgomaster had accepted his invitation, said, "Yes, I knew that, Burgomaster, but in the first mo-

ments I've always forgotten it all—everything is going in circles around me, and it's better for me to ask, even when I know everything. You also presumably know that I am the hunter Gracchus.”

“Of course,” said the burgomaster. “I received the news today, during the night. We had been sleeping for some time. Then around midnight my wife called, ‘Salvatore’—that’s my name—‘look at the dove at the window!’ It was really a dove, but as large as a rooster. It flew up to my ear and said, ‘Tomorrow the dead hunter Gracchus is coming. Welcome him in the name of the city.’”

The hunter nodded and pushed the tip of his tongue between his lips. “Yes, the doves fly here before me. But do you believe, Burgomaster, that I am to remain in Riva?”

“That I cannot yet say,” answered the burgomaster. “Are you dead?”

“Yes,” said the hunter, “as you see. Many years ago—it must have been a great many years ago—I fell from a rock in the Black Forest—that’s in Germany—as I was tracking a chamois. Since then I’ve been dead.”

“But you’re also alive,” said the burgomaster.

“To a certain extent,” said the hunter, “to a certain extent I am also alive. My death boat lost its way—a wrong turn of the helm, a moment when the helmsman was not paying attention, a detour through my wonderful homeland—I don’t know what it was. I only know that I remain on the earth and that since that time my boat has journeyed over earthly waters. So I—who only wanted to live in my own mountains—travel on after my death through all the countries of the earth.”

“And have you no share in the world beyond?” asked the burgomaster wrinkling his brow.

The hunter answered, “I am always on the immense staircase leading up to it. I roam around on this infinitely wide flight of steps, sometimes up, sometimes down, sometimes to the right, sometimes to the left, always in motion. From being a hunter I’ve become a butterfly. Don’t laugh.”

“I’m not laughing,” protested the burgomaster.

“That’s very considerate of you,” said the hunter. “I am always moving. But when I go through the greatest upward motion and the door is already shining right above me, I wake up on my old boat, still drearily stranded in some earthly stretch of water. The basic mistake of my earlier death smirks at me in my cabin. Julia, the wife of the helmsman, knocks and brings to me on the bier the morning drink of the country whose coast we are sailing by at the time. I lie on a wooden plank bed, wearing—I’m no delight to look at—a filthy shroud, my hair and beard, black and gray, are inextricably tangled, my legs covered by a large silk women’s scarf, with a floral pattern and long fringes. At my head stands a church candle which illuminates me. On the wall opposite me is a small picture, evidently of a bushman aiming his spear at me and concealing himself as much as possible behind a splendidly paint-ed shield. On board ship one comes across many stupid pictures, but this is one of the stupidest. Beyond that, my wooden cage is completely empty. Through a hole in the side wall the warm air of the southern nights comes in, and I hear the water lapping against the old boat.

“I have been lying here since the time when I—the still living hunter Gracchus—was pursuing a chamois to its home in the Black Forest and fell. Everything took place as it should. I followed, fell down, bled to death in a ravine, was dead, and this boat was supposed to carry me to the other side. I still remember how happily I stretched myself out here on the planking for the first time. The mountains have never heard me singing the way these four still shadowy walls did then.

“I had been happy to be alive and was happy to be dead. Before I came on board, I gladly threw away my rag-tag collection of guns and bags, and the hunting rifle which I had always carried proudly, and slipped into the shroud like a young girl into her wedding dress. Here I lay down and waited. Then the accident happened.”

“A nasty fate,” said the burgomaster, raising his hand in a gesture of depreciation, “and you are not to blame for it in any way?”

“No,” said the hunter. “I was a hunter. Is there any blame in that? I was raised to be a hunter in the Black Forest, where at that time there were still wolves. I lay in wait, shot, hit the target, removed the skin—is there any blame in that? My work was blessed. ‘The great hunter of the Black Forest’—that’s what they called me. Is that something bad?”

“It not up to me to decide that,” said the burgomaster, “but it seems to me as well that there’s no blame there. But then who is to blame?”

“The boatswain,” said the hunter. “No one will read what I write here, no one will come to help me. If people were assigned the task of helping me, all the doors of all the houses would remain closed, all the windows would be shut, they would all lie in bed, with sheets thrown over their heads, the entire earth would be a hostel for the night. And that makes good sense, for no one knows of me, and if he did, he would have no idea of where I was staying, and if he knew that, he would still not know how to keep me there, and so he would not know how to help me. The thought of wanting to help me is a sickness and has to be cured with bed rest.

“I know that, and so I do not cry out to summon help, even if at moments—when I have no self-control, for example, right now—I do think about that very seriously. But to get rid of such ideas I need only look around and recall where I am and where—and this I can assert with full confidence—I have lived for centuries.”

“That’s extraordinary,” said the burgomaster, “extraordinary. And now are you intending to remain with us in Riva?”

“I have no intentions,” said the hunter with a smile and, to make up for his mocking tone, laid a hand on the burgomaster’s knee. “I am here. I don’t know any more than that. There’s nothing more I can do. My boat is without a helm—it journeys with the wind which blows in the deepest regions of death.”

The Great Wall of China¹

The Great Wall of China was finished at its most northerly location. The construction work moved up from the south-east and south-west and joined at this point. This system of building in sections was also followed on a small scale within the two great armies of workers, the eastern and western armies. It was carried out in the following manner: groups of about twenty workers were formed, each of which had to take on a section of the wall, about five hundred metres long. A neighbouring group then built a wall of similar length to meet them. But then afterwards, when the sections were fully joined, construction was not continued on any further at the end of this thousand-metre section. Instead the groups of workers were shipped off again to build the wall in completely different regions. Naturally, with this method many large gaps arose, which were filled in only gradually and slowly, many of them not until after it had already been reported that the building of the wall was complete. In fact, there are said to be gaps which have never been built in at all, although that's merely an assertion which probably belongs among the many legends which have arisen about the structure and which, for individual people at least, are impossible to prove with their own eyes and according to their own standards, because the structure is so immense.

Now, at first one might think it would have been more advantageous in every way to build in continuous sections or at least continuously within two main sections. For the wall was conceived as a protection against the people of the north, as was commonly announced and universally known. But how can protection be provided by a wall which is not built continuously? In fact, not only can such a wall not protect, but the structure itself is in constant danger. Those parts of the wall left standing abandoned in deserted regions could always be destroyed easily by the nomads, especially by those back then who, worried about the building of the wall, changed their place of residence with incredible speed, like grasshoppers, and thus perhaps had an even better overall view of how the construction was proceeding than

¹ Written in 1917, but not published in Kafka's lifetime; first published in 1931.

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*The Metamorphosis, A Hunger Artist, In
the Penal Colony and Other Short Stories*
as translated by Ian Johnston.

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A Note on the Translator

Ian Johnston is a retired college and university-college instructor, now a Research Associate at Vancouver Island University in Nanaimo, British Columbia. A number of his translations, workbooks, and lectures, have been posted on his web page at the following internet site:

<http://www.records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/index.htm>

Richer Resources Publications has published a number of Johnston translations as paperback books, including the following:

Aeschylus, *Oresteia*
Aristophanes, *Birds*
Aristophanes, *Clouds*
Aristophanes, *Frogs*
Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*
Aristophanes, *Peace*
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Euripides, *Medea*
Homer, *Iliad* (complete and abridged editions)
Homer, *Odyssey* (complete and abridged editions)
Kant, *Universal History and Nature of the Heavens*
Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*
Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*
Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*
Sophocles, *Antigone*
Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*
Sophocles, *Philoctetes*.

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Naxos Audiobooks has released recordings of the Johnston translations of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (both the complete and abridged versions) and of *Beyond Good and Evil*.

Franz Kafka

The Metamorphosis, A Hunger Artist, In the Penal Colony, and Other Stories

A New Translation by Ian Johnston

Franz Kafka (1883-1924), whose writings attracted relatively little attention in his own lifetime, has long been recognized as one of the most famous, distinctive, and influential voices in modern world literature. His "Erzählungen" (stories), which are famously enigmatic, have prompted and continue to prompt a wide variety of critical debates from any number of literary schools and have stimulated interpretative adaptations of many different kinds by actors, painters, photographers, and film makers.

Kafka's fictions typically present an unusual, sometimes surreal story, in a deliberately flat prose, so that there is a wrenching gap between the weirdness, tension, humour, or horror of the events described and the apparently calm surface of the language. It is a style which at once pressures the reader to discover some allegorical structure at work in the tale, while at the same time frustrating all attempts to impose such an interpretative scheme. Hence, Kafka's stories, which for this reason some have called "parables," tend to remain in the reader's imagination as vivid puzzling challenges and are very difficult to forget. The strange world Kafka depicts in his stories has given rise to the adjective Kafkaesque, which Merriam Webster defines as "having a nightmarishly complex, bizarre, or illogical quality."

This new collection of stories translated by Ian Johnston includes a selection of Kafka's best known and most popular stories, "Metamorphosis," "In the Penal Colony," "A Hunger Artist," "A Report for An Academy," "The Great Wall of China," "Jackals and Arabs," and "About the Translator."



Ian Johnston was born in Valparaiso, Chile, and educated in Canada and England. He has a BSc from McGill in Geology and Chemistry, a BA from Bristol in English and Greek, and an MA from Toronto in English. For many years he taught as a college and university-college instructor in British Columbia teaching English, Classics and Liberal Studies. He is the author of *The Ironies of War: An Introduction to Homer's Iliad*. His translation of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* have recently been published in both book and audiobook form. He is now retired and living in