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# *The Trial*



## Arrest

SOMEONE MUST HAVE BEEN slandering Josef K., for one morning, without having done anything wrong, he was arrested. The cook, employed by his landlady Frau Grubach, who brought him his breakfast each morning at about eight o'clock, failed to appear. That had never happened before. K. waited for a while and, with his head on the pillow, looked at the old lady in the house opposite who was observing him with a quite uncharacteristic curiosity, but then, feeling both hungry and disturbed, he rang the bell. At once there was a knock at the door and a man entered whom he had never seen in the house before. He was slim and yet solidly built, he wore a closely fitting black suit which, like a traveller's outfit, was provided with various pleats, pockets, buckles, buttons and a belt, and as a result seemed eminently practical, although its purpose remained unclear. "Who are you?" K. asked, and immediately began to sit up in bed. But the man ignored the question, as if his presence required no explanation, and merely said: "You rang?" "Tell Anna to bring me my breakfast," said K., trying to work out through silent observation and reflection who the man could be. The man, however, did not submit to this scrutiny for long, but turned instead to the door which he opened a little in order to tell someone who was clearly standing directly behind it: "He wants Anna to bring him his breakfast." There was a brief snigger from the adjoining room, and it was not clear from the sound whether several people might not be involved. Although the stranger could scarcely have learnt anything new from this, he now said to K., as if making an

announcement: "That is not possible." "I've never heard that before," said K., who leapt out of bed and quickly pulled on his trousers. "I must find out who these people are in there, and see what explanation Frau Grubach can give for such a disturbance." He realized at once, of course, that he should not have said this out loud, and that by doing so he had in a sense acknowledged the stranger's right to preside over his actions, but it did not seem important to him at that moment. Still, the stranger took it in that way, for he said: "Hadn't you better stay here?" "I have no wish to stay here nor to be addressed by you, until you tell me who you are." "I was only trying to help," the stranger said, and now opened the door of his own accord. The adjoining room, which K. entered more slowly than he had intended, looked at first glance almost exactly as it had done the previous evening. It was Frau Grubach's living room, perhaps there was slightly more space than usual among all the furniture, rugs, china and photographs with which it was crammed, but it was not immediately obvious, especially as the most striking change was the presence of a man who was sitting at the open window, reading a book, from which he now looked up. "You should have stayed in your room! Didn't Franz tell you that?" "Yes, but what do you want?" K. asked, looking from this new acquaintance to the man called Franz, who was still standing in the doorway, and then back again. Through the open window the old woman could be seen again, she had moved with truly senile curiosity to the window exactly opposite, so that she could continue to keep an eye on everything. "I wish to see Frau Grubach—" K. said, making a move to break free from the two men and leave the room, even though they were standing some distance away from him. "No," said the man at the window, and he threw the book onto a small table and stood up. "You may not leave, you've been arrested." "So it seems," said K. "But why?" he asked. "We are not authorized to tell you. Go to your room

and wait. Proceedings have already been initiated, and you will be told everything in due course. I'm doing more than I should by talking to you in such a friendly way. But I hope no one can hear except Franz, and he himself has defied regulations by being so friendly towards you. If you continue in the future to be as fortunate as you have been in your warders, you will have reason to be confident." K. wanted to sit down, but then saw that there was no seat in the entire room, except the chair by the window. "You'll come to realize the truth of all this," said Franz, as he walked towards him with the other man. The latter in particular towered over K. and kept tapping him on the shoulder. Both of them examined K.'s nightshirt, and said that he would now have to wear one of much poorer quality, but that they would look after this one and the rest of his underwear which, if his case turned out well, they would return to him. "It's better to give us these things than hand them over to the depot," they said, "because a fair amount of theft goes on at the depot, and besides, they sell everything after a time, regardless of whether the proceedings in question have been concluded or not. And you can't imagine how long cases like this have taken, especially recently! Of course you'd get the proceeds from the depot in the end, but firstly, they don't amount to very much, because the price is not based on the size of the offer but on the size of the bribe, and secondly, experience shows that such proceeds dwindle, as year by year they pass from hand to hand." K. hardly paid any attention to these remarks, he attached little importance to any rights he might have to dispose of his own things, it was much more important for him to get a clear picture of his position, but he could not even think in the presence of these men; the belly of the second warder – they could of course be no more than warders – kept prodding him in a positively friendly way, yet if he looked up, he caught sight of a face that was completely at odds with that fat body, a desiccated, bony face with a prominent nose,



twisted to one side, that was conferring above his head with the other warder. What sort of people were they? What were they talking about? To which authority did they belong? K., after all, lived in a legal state, there was universal peace in the land, all the laws were upheld, who had the temerity to assault him in his own home? He had always tended to take things lightly, to believe the worst only when the worst happened, making no provision for the future, even when everything looked black and threatening. But that did not now seem to be the right approach, one could of course consider the whole thing a joke, a crude joke which for some unknown reason his colleagues at the bank were playing on him, perhaps because today was his thirtieth birthday, that was of course possible, perhaps all he had to do was laugh knowingly in the warders' faces and they would laugh with him, perhaps they were porters picked off the street, they were not unlike porters – nonetheless, from the moment he had first seen the warder called Franz, he had been utterly determined not to surrender even the slightest advantage he might hold over these people. K. knew there was a slight risk that someone might say later that he could not take a joke, but although it was not in his nature to learn from experience, he remembered a few incidents, unimportant in themselves, when, unlike his friends, he had deliberately set out to behave recklessly without the slightest regard for possible consequences, and had suffered as a result. That was not going to happen again, not this time at any rate, if it was all a piece of play-acting, he would go along with it.

He was still free. "Excuse me," he said, and walked quickly between the warders into his room. "He seems a reasonable fellow," he heard one of them say behind him. Having reached his room, he quickly opened the drawer of his desk, where everything lay in perfect order, but he was so agitated that he could not at first find the identity papers he was looking for. Eventually he found his bicycle licence and was about to take

this to the warders when it occurred to him that the document was too trivial, and he went on looking until he found his birth certificate. As he was going back into the next room, the door opposite opened and Frau Grubach was preparing to come in. She was only visible for a second, for as soon as she saw K. she was clearly seized with embarrassment, apologized, vanished and shut the door with the utmost care. "But please come in," was all that K. had been able to say. But now he stood with his papers in the middle of the room, still looking at the door, which did not open again, until he was roused by a shout from the warders who were sitting at a table by the open window and devouring, as he now saw, his breakfast. "Why didn't she come in?" he asked. "She's not allowed to," the tall warder said, "you're under arrest." "But how can I be under arrest? Especially in this manner?" "You're at it again," the warder said, and dipped his slice of bread and butter in the honeypot. "We don't answer questions like that." "You'll have to answer them," K. told him. "Here are my identity papers. Now show me yours, especially the warrant for my arrest." "Good God!" the warder said, "why can't you just accept your situation, instead of insisting on annoying us unnecessarily, we who are probably now closer to you than anyone else you know." "It's true, take our word for it," said Franz, not raising the coffee cup to his lips but staring at K. with a long and no doubt meaningful yet incomprehensible look. Without wishing to, K. found himself drawn into a staring match with Franz, but at last he thumped his papers and said: "Here are my identity papers." "What's that got to do with anything?" the tall warder cried out. "You're behaving worse than a child. What is it you want? Do you think you'll get this wretched case of yours over quicker by wrangling with us, your warders, about identity papers and arrest warrants? We are lowly officials who can barely understand such documents, and our only role in your case is to guard you for ten hours a day and get paid for it.

That's all we are, but we are quite capable of understanding that the high authorities we serve, before ordering such an arrest, inform themselves in great detail about the reasons for that arrest and the person they're arresting. There's no possibility of a mistake. Our officials, in as much as I know them, and I know only the lowest category, never go looking for guilt in the population, but are, as the law states, attracted by guilt and must then send us warders out. That's the law. Where could there be a mistake in that?" "I don't know this law," K. said. "So much the worse for you," the warder said. "It probably only exists in your imagination," said K., who wanted somehow to insinuate his way into his warders' thoughts, turn them to his own advantage or accustom himself to them. But the warder merely said dismissively: "You soon will." Franz interrupted and said: "See, Willem, he admits he doesn't know the law, yet claims he's innocent." "You're quite right, but it's impossible to make a man like that see reason," the other said. K. said nothing more; "Do I really have to let myself be confused," he thought, "by the idle talk of these mere minions, for they admit themselves that's all they are. In any case, they're talking of things they simply don't understand. It's only their stupidity that gives them such confidence. A few words with someone on my own intellectual level would make everything incomparably clearer than talking interminably with these two." He paced up and down a few times in the uncluttered part of the room, across the way he saw the old woman who had pulled a much older man to the window and was now holding him in a tight embrace; K. felt he must put an end to this farce: "Take me to your superior," he said. "When he's so inclined, not before," said the warder called Willem. "And now I advise you," he added, "to go to your room, stay calm and wait and see what they decide to do with you. We advise you not to get distracted by useless thoughts, but to pull yourself together, great demands will be made on you. We have deserved better

treatment from you, considering how accommodating we've been, you are forgetting that, whatever else we may be, we are at least free men compared with you, that is no small advantage. Nonetheless we are prepared, if you have money, to bring you a little breakfast from the café opposite."

K. stood still for a little while, without replying to this offer. Perhaps if he were to open the door of the adjoining room or even the door into the hall, neither of them would dare to stop him, perhaps the simplest solution would be to bring the whole matter to a head. On the other hand they might indeed grab hold of him, and once he had been knocked to the floor he would lose all the superiority which, in a sense, he still had over them. He therefore preferred the safety of whatever solution would arise in the natural course of events, and went back to his room without another word being said by either him or the warders.

He threw himself onto his bed and took from the bedside table a nice apple he had put aside the previous evening for his breakfast. It was all the breakfast he would be having now, and yet it was, as he told himself when he took his first big bite, much better than the breakfast he would have had from the filthy night café, as a favour from the warders. He felt confident and at ease, although he was missing work at the bank this morning, that would easily be excused in view of the comparatively high position he held there. Should he give the real reason? He intended to do so. If they didn't believe him, which would be understandable in the circumstances, he could call Frau Grubach as a witness or even the two old people across the way, who were probably even now moving to the window opposite him. It surprised K., at least from the warders' perspective, that they had forced him into the room and left him alone there, where it would be ten times easier to kill himself. At the same time he asked himself, from his own perspective, what reason he could possibly have for doing that.

Because the pair of them were sitting in the next room and had intercepted his breakfast? Killing himself would have been so senseless that, even if he had wanted to, its very senselessness would have prevented him. Had the intellectual limitations of the warders not been so obvious, it might have been assumed that they too, for the same reason, would have seen no danger in leaving him alone. If they wanted to, they could observe him as he now went to a little wall-cupboard, where he kept some good brandy, downed a glass as a substitute for breakfast and then another to give him courage, but only as a precaution, in the unlikely event that courage would be needed.

A call from the adjoining room then startled him so much that he knocked his teeth on the glass. "The Inspector wants you!" It was only the shouting that startled him, the curt, clipped military way of shouting that he would not have thought the warder Franz capable of. The command itself was most welcome. "At last!" he shouted back, locked the cupboard and hurried at once into the adjoining room. The two warders were standing there and drove him back into his own room, as if that were the most natural thing in the world. "What can you be thinking of?" they cried. "If you appear before the Inspector in your nightshirt, he'll have you thrashed and us as well!" "For God's sake, leave me alone," cried K., who had already been pushed back against his wardrobe, "if you burst in when I'm in bed, you can't expect me to be wearing my Sunday best." "That won't help," said the warders who, whenever K. shouted at them, became quite calm, almost sad, and thus either confused him or brought him to some extent to his senses. "Ridiculous formalities!" he growled, but he had already taken a coat from the chair and held it up for a moment in both hands, as if submitting it to the warders' judgement. They shook their heads. "It has to be a black coat," they said. Whereupon K. threw the coat to the ground and said – without knowing himself what nuance he meant to give the words – "But it's not the main hearing yet."

The warders smiled but reiterated: "It has to be a black coat." "That's fine by me, as long as it accelerates proceedings," said K., opened the wardrobe himself, searched for a long time among his many clothes, selected his best black suit, a lounge suit that had caused quite a stir among his acquaintances because of its elegant cut, put on a fresh shirt and began to dress with care. He secretly believed that in doing this he had speeded things up, for the warders had forgotten to insist on his having a bath. He observed them to see if they might still remember, but naturally it never occurred to them, although Willem did not forget to send Franz to the Inspector with the message that K. was dressing.

When he was fully dressed, he had to walk directly in front of Willem through the empty room next door into the adjoining room, the double doors to which were already wide open. This room, as K. knew very well, had recently been taken by a certain Fräulein Bürstner, a typist, who left for work very early, came home late, and with whom K. had exchanged little more than a few words of greeting. Her little bedside table had been shifted into the middle of the room to serve as the interrogator's desk, and the Inspector was sitting behind it. He had crossed his legs and one arm was resting on the back of the chair. Three young men were standing in a corner of the room, looking at Fräulein Bürstner's photographs, which were mounted on a board on the wall. A white blouse hung on the catch of the open window. The old couple could once more be seen in the window opposite, but they had been joined by someone else, for towering behind them stood a man with his shirt open at the chest, twisting and twirling his reddish pointed beard.

"Josef K.?" the Inspector asked, perhaps merely to direct K.'s wandering gaze back to himself. K. nodded. "I suppose you are very surprised by this morning's events?" the Inspector asked, rearranging with both hands the few objects lying on

the bedside table, candle and matches, a book and a pincushion, as if they were objects he required for the interrogation. "Of course," K. said, and felt a sense of well-being at finally encountering a sensible man with whom he could discuss his situation, "of course I'm surprised, but by no means very surprised." "Not very surprised?" the Inspector asked, placing the candle in the middle of the little table and grouping the other objects around it. "Perhaps you misunderstand me," K. was quick to observe. "I mean—" Here K. broke off and looked round for a chair. "I suppose I can sit down?" he asked. "It is not customary," the Inspector replied. "I mean," K. continued without any further pause, "I am of course very surprised, but if you've lived in this world for thirty years and have had to make your own way, as I have, you become hardened to surprises and don't take them too seriously. Especially not today's." "Why especially not today's?" "I'm not saying I think the whole thing's a joke, the arrangements that have been made seem too extensive for that. Everyone in the boarding house would have to be involved as well as all of you, and that would be beyond a joke. So I'm not saying it's a joke." "Quite correct," said the Inspector and checked how many matches there were in the matchbox. "On the other hand," K. continued and turned to them all and would have even liked to include the three by the photographs, "on the other hand, the matter can't be that important either. I deduce this from the fact that, though I've been accused, I can't think of the slightest grounds for any accusation. But even that's beside the point, the main question is: who's accusing me? What authority is conducting these proceedings? Are you officials? No one's wearing a uniform, unless" – here he turned to Franz – "you call your suit a uniform, but it's more like a travelling outfit. I demand clarification on these matters, after which I'm convinced that we shall part on the friendliest of terms." The Inspector threw the matchbox down on the table. "You are mightily mistaken,"

he said. "These gentlemen and I are merely marginal figures in your affair, indeed we know almost nothing about it. We could be wearing the most official uniforms and your case would be none the worse. Also, I am quite unable to report that you have been charged, or rather I don't know whether you have been. It's true that you are under arrest, but that's all I know. Perhaps you've heard the warders gossiping, if so it was only idle talk. So, although I am unable to answer your questions, I can at least give you some advice: think less about us and more about what's going to happen to you, think more about yourself. And don't keep going on about how innocent you feel, it disturbs the otherwise not unfavourable impression you are making. And you should in general be far more reticent, almost everything you've just said could have been inferred from your behaviour, even if you had said no more than a few words, and in any case the impression you made was not entirely to your advantage."

K. stared at the Inspector. Was he really going to be told off like a schoolboy by someone perhaps younger than himself? Was he really going to be reprimanded for his openness? And was he to learn nothing about why he had been arrested and on whose authority? He became somewhat agitated, paced up and down, without being hindered, pushed back his cuffs, felt his chest, adjusted his hair, walked past the three men, said "This simply doesn't make sense," at which they turned and looked at him sympathetically but seriously, and finally came to a halt in front of the Inspector's table. "Lawyer Hasterer is a good friend of mine," he said, "can I phone him?" "Certainly," the Inspector said, "but I can't see what sense there is in that, unless you have some private matter to discuss with him." "What sense?" K. cried out, more shaken than annoyed. "Who do you think you are? You talk about sense, and yet you behave in the most senseless way imaginable. It's enough to make one weep. First of all these gentlemen assault me, and now they sit or stand around expecting me to perform tricks for you. What



sense is there, you say, in phoning a lawyer when I'm supposed to be under arrest? Very well then, I won't phone." "Please go ahead," the Inspector said, and pointed to the hall, where the telephone was, "please do." "No, I no longer wish to," K. said and went to the window. The group across the way was still at the window, and it was only now K. had reached his window that their silent vigil was disturbed a little. The old couple started to rise, but the man behind reassured them. "There's another lot of spectators," K. shouted to the Inspector, pointing them out with his finger. "Get away from there," he called out to them. The three immediately drew back a few steps, the old couple even withdrawing behind the man, who was shielding them with his ample body and, judging from the movement of his lips, was saying something that could not be understood at that distance. They did not, however, disappear entirely, but seemed to be waiting for the moment when they could once more approach the window unnoticed. "Impertinent, thoughtless creatures!" K. said, turning back to the room. It was possible that the Inspector shared his view, as far as K. could tell from a hasty look in his direction. But it was equally possible that he had not been listening at all, for he had pressed his hand down firmly on the table and seemed to be comparing the length of his fingers. The two warders were sitting on a chest covered with an embroidered cloth and were rubbing their knees. The three young men had placed their hands on their hips and were looking around aimlessly. It was as silent as in some abandoned office. "Well then, gentlemen," cried K., who felt for a moment that he was responsible for all of them, "to judge from your expressions, this affair of mine would seem to be settled. The best thing in my view would be not to worry any more about whether your actions were justified or not, but to shake hands and bring the matter to a peaceful conclusion. If you share my opinion, then please—" and he went up to the Inspector's table and held out his hand.

The Inspector raised his eyes, bit his lips and looked at K.'s outstretched hand, which K. still believed the Inspector would grasp. Instead he rose to his feet, picked up a hard round hat from Fräulein Bürstner's bed, and with both hands put it carefully on his head, as one does when trying on a new hat. "How simple everything seems to you!" he said to K. "So you think that we should bring the matter to a peaceful conclusion, do you? No, no, that really can't be done. By which I definitely do not imply that you should despair. Why should you? You're under arrest, that's all. It was my duty to inform you of that, I've done so and have observed your reaction. That's enough for today, and we can now say goodbye, for the time being, of course. I suppose you'll now be wanting to go to the bank?" "To the bank?" K. asked. "I thought I was under arrest." K. said this with a certain defiance, for although his offer to shake hands had been declined, he was feeling increasingly independent of all these people, especially now that the Inspector had got to his feet. He was toying with them. If they ever went away, he intended to run after them as far as the gate and offer to be arrested. That was why he repeated: "How can I go to the bank when I'm under arrest?" "Ah, I see," said the Inspector, who was already at the door, "you've misunderstood me; yes, you're under arrest, but that should not prevent you from going about your business. And neither should you be hindered in the course of your ordinary life." "Then being under arrest is not so bad," K. said, and went up to the Inspector. "I never said it was," he replied. "In which case it looks as if there was no real necessity for you even to tell me about my arrest," K. said, and stepped even closer. The others had also come nearer. They were all now crowded into a narrow space by the door. "It was my duty," said the Inspector. "An idiotic duty," K. said without sympathy. "Perhaps," the Inspector replied, "but let's not waste time talking like this. I had assumed you would wish to go to the bank. Since you are so fussy with words, let me

add: I'm not compelling you to go to the bank, I had merely assumed you would want to. And to facilitate that, and to make your arrival at the bank as inconspicuous as possible, I've arranged for these three gentlemen, colleagues of yours, to be placed at your disposal." "What?" K. cried and stared at the three in astonishment. These anaemic and bland young men, whom he had noted only as the group beside the photographs, were in fact employees at his bank, not colleagues, that was an overstatement and indicated a flaw in the Inspector's omniscience, but they were undoubtedly junior employees from the bank. How could K. have failed to notice that? How utterly preoccupied he must have been with the Inspector and the warders not to recognize these three. Formal, arm-swinging Rabensteiner, fair-haired Kullich with his deep-set eyes, and Kaminer with his insufferable smile, caused by a chronic muscular spasm. "Good morning!" K. said after a moment and held out his hand to the men, who were bowing politely. "I completely failed to recognize you. Well, let's set off for work, shall we?" The men nodded and laughed enthusiastically, as if they had been waiting for this all the time, only when K. realized he had forgotten his hat, which he had left in his room, did they all rush out together to fetch it, indicating that they were just a little embarrassed after all. K. stood still and watched them pass through the two open doors, with the apathetic Rabensteiner of course, who had broken into no more than an elegant trot, bringing up the rear. Kaminer handed over the hat and K. had to remind himself, as he often did at the bank, that Kaminer's smile was involuntary, and that he was quite unable to smile when he wanted to. Frau Grubach, who did not give the impression of being conscious of any guilt, then opened the front door in the hall for the entire company, and K. looked down, as he often did, at the apron-string which cut so unnecessarily deep into her massive body. Once downstairs, K. took his watch in his hand and decided,

he was already half an hour late, to call a taxi in order to prevent any further delay. Kaminer ran to the corner to fetch a taxi, and the other two were evidently trying to distract K.'s attention, when Kullich suddenly pointed to the door of the house opposite, where the man with the pale pointed beard had just appeared and, initially a little embarrassed at showing himself at his full height, had retreated to the wall and leant against it. The old couple must still have been on the stairs. K. was annoyed with Kullich for drawing attention to the man, whom he had already seen earlier and had in fact been expecting. "Don't look in that direction," he blurted out, without realizing how strange it must have seemed to speak that way to grown men. But no explanation was necessary, for at that moment the taxi arrived, they got in, and it drove off. K. then realized that he hadn't seen the Inspector and the warders depart, the Inspector had blocked his view of the three clerks, and now the clerks had done the same for the Inspector. That did not show much presence of mind, and K. resolved to be more careful in this respect. Yet he swivelled round involuntarily and leant over the back of the taxi to see if he could catch a glimpse of the Inspector and the warders. But he turned around again immediately and leant back comfortably in the corner, without having made the slightest effort to look for anyone. Despite appearances, he now needed some words of encouragement, but the men suddenly seemed tired. Rabensteiner was looking out of the taxi to the right, Kullich to the left, which left only Kaminer and his grin, which common decency unfortunately forbade one to joke about.

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