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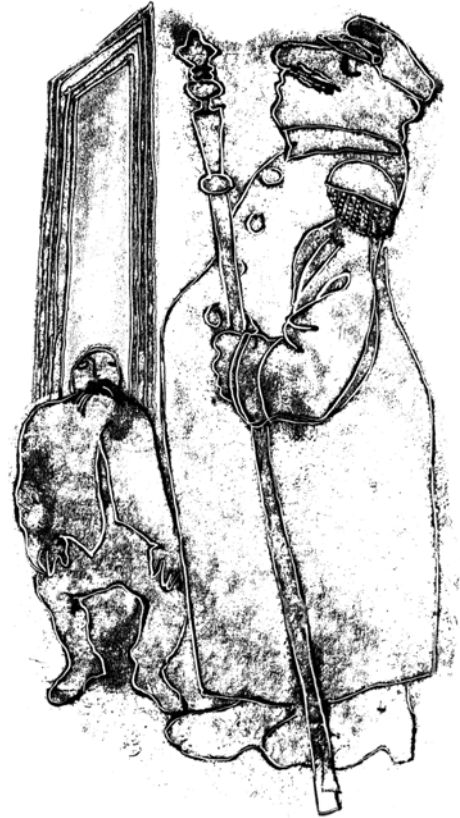
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A Country Doctor.

I was in a dire predicament: an urgent journey lay before me; a gravely ill patient awaited me in a village ten miles away; a heavy snowfall filled the vast space between me and him; I had a light carriage with large wheels perfectly suited to our highways; wrapped in my fur coat, medical bag in hand, I was standing in the courtyard ready for the journey; but the horse was lacking, the horse. My own horse had died the previous night because it had worked too

hard this icy winter; my servant-girl was now running around the village looking to borrow a horse; but it was hopeless, I knew it and, increasingly covered by snow, growing more and more motionless, I stood there doing nothing. The girl appeared at the gate, alone, swinging the lantern; of course, who would lend out his horse now for such a journey? I paced across the courtyard again; nothing came to me; distracted, I kicked in anguish at the splintering door of the pigsty, which had not been used for years. It opened and swung back and forth on its hinges. Warmth and an odour like that of horses wafted out. Inside, a dim lantern swayed on a rope. Cowering in the low shed, a man presented his frank, blue-eyed visage. "Shall I hitch

days and years. He makes many attempts to get permission to enter, and tires the doorkeeper with his requests. The doorkeeper often holds brief interviews with him, interrogates him about his home and many other things, but they are disinterested questions, the kind great lords ask, and in the end he always tells him that he still cannot let him enter. The man, who has brought many provisions for his journey, uses everything, no matter how valuable, to bribe the doorkeeper. Although the doorkeeper accepts everything, he always says: "I am only accepting it so that you do not think you have neglected anything." Over the many years, the man observes the doorkeeper almost continuously. He forgets the other doorkeepers, and this



of publications to his name: pieces in newspapers, magazines and almanacs, and four books. Ernst Rowohlt Verlag had brought out his anthology *Meditation* in late 1912; Kurt Wolff Verlag in Leipzig published the fragment *The Stoker* in May 1913, followed by *The Metamorphosis* in December 1915, while his pivotal story *The Judgement* appeared in October 1916 in volume 54 of Kurt Wolff's literary series *Der Jüngste Tag* (*Judgement Day*).

In September 1916, Kafka was invited to give one of a series of Contemporary Literature Evenings at the *Galerie Neue Kunst Hans Goltz* in Munich. The exact date of the event was up in the air for a long time, but the author eventually travelled to the Bavarian capital by train on 10 November, and stayed in the Hotel Bayerischer Hof



with Felice Bauer, who had arrived from Berlin. He opened the evening with a selection of poems by Max Brod, before reading from his unpublished story *In the Penal Colony*. It is sometimes claimed that Rainer Maria Rilke was among the audience, but this is uncertain. The local critics were not particularly enamoured of Kafka's performance. According to the *Münchner Neuesten Nachrichten* (*Latest Munich News*), the story he'd read had gone on too long, and his account of the torture device had been technically able, yet repulsive. Similarly, the *München-Augsburger Abend-Zeitung* (*Munich-Augsburg Evening Newspaper*) reported on 13 November that the story had been over-long and not particularly gripping. The *Münchener Zeitung* (*Munich Newspaper*) went so far as to designate its author "a voluptuary of horror"¹. Kafka himself later acknowledged that the reading had been a piece of "fantastical presumption"², yet the event fired

2. View into Na Poříčí with the domed AUA building, Kafka's workplace as of 1908.

3. *Meditation* (1912), Verlag Ernst Rowohlt • 4. *The Stoker* (1913), Verlag Kurt Wolff • 5. *The Metamorphosis* (1915/16), Verlag Kurt Wolff • 6. *The Judgement* (1916), Verlag Kurt Wolff.



had Ottla make his apologies to his boss, senior inspector Eugen Pohl. It is sometimes claimed that he spent New Year's Eve 1916 in the little house, but a cryptic note to Ottla leaves the question unanswered: "Firstly, Happy New Year to you all. [...] I saw in the new year by standing up and holding up the standard lamp towards it. Nobody can hold fire in a glass."¹⁶

On 11 February 1917, Max Brod visited his friend in his writing room up at the castle: "At Kafka's in Alchymistengasse. He reads aloud beautifully. A true poet's monastic cell."¹⁷ Oskar Baum, the blind poet, also came round, and remembered both the smoking stove and the prevailing quiet.

In spring 1917, Kafka declared that he'd like to stay in the little lane overnight in the warmer months: "Franz wants to sleep up there in summer, in the lower kitchen, the one that's really a cellar. He wants an iron bedstead and a straw mattress, and he wants to work early. The kitchen has a large window looking over the Stag Moat, and you'd surely hear nothing but birdsong."¹⁸

After two years in Lange Gasse, he left the noisy balcony room in February 1917. In early March, he moved into a small, two-room flat on the second floor of the Schönborn Palace on Marktgasse (Tržiště) in the Lesser Town. The flat didn't even have its own kitchen, yet he was intending to set up home there with Felice Bauer after the war.

When his sister Ottla packed her bags in April 1917, ready to manage her brother-in-law Karl Hermann's

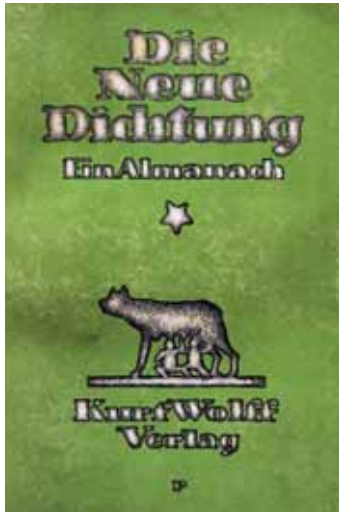
The love between a brother and sister
is a repetition of the love between
a father and mother.

Franz Kafka, *Diaries*



country estate in Zürau (Sřem), northern Bohemia, their parents were deprived of a crucial staff member in the business, and Kafka lost his "landlady's" solicitous attentions: "After your departure there was a strong gale in the Stag Moat, perhaps coincidentally, perhaps by design. Yesterday I overslept in the Palais; when I came up to the house, the fire had gone out and very cold. Aha, I thought, the first evening without her and already lost. But then I took all the newspapers and also manuscripts and after a while a very nice fire came about."¹⁹

24. View of Prague Castle; to the right, the Mánes Bridge, with the Old Town bank of the Vltava in the foreground.



to come out soon. Not as though I could be reconciled with my father in this way, the roots of this enmity are too deep to pull up here, but I would still have done something: if I had not emigrated to Palestine, I would at least have run my finger over it on the map.”³⁰ Kafka had resolved to send the manuscripts to Reiß when, in mid-March 1918, the long-awaited proofs arrived, and the idea of changing publisher was shelved. Progress on the proofs remained sluggish at

first though. Publishing director Georg Heinrich Meyer wrote to explain the delays, alluding to difficulties in book production in general, mentioning the lack of the

Our art is being blinded by the truth:
the light on the retreating grotesque face
is true, nothing else.

Franz Kafka, *Aphorisms*

37. Cover for the 1917/18 edition of Kurt-Wolff-Verlag's almanac *Die neue Dichtung* (New Poetry), in which the story *The Country Doctor* appeared prior to publication.

38. František Max, *The Golden Lane*, c. 1955.

selected type and, to Kafka's amazement, asking for his story *A Dream* to be resent because the typescript had got lost in the intervening period. Kafka thanked him, reminded him of his desired dedication and added tenaciously that it would be a pity if he were not to receive any further proofs.

In October 1918, amid all this back and forth, Kafka fell seriously ill with the Spanish flu. Once he had recovered, he wrote to Kurt Wolff on 11 November “with almost my first pen-stroke after a long lying-in-bed”³¹ to thank the publisher for an amicable letter that had arrived. At the end of the year, Kafka travelled to the private Pension Stüdl in Schelesen (Želízy) to convalesce. On 16 February 1919, he received the set page proofs, which had been sent onto him from Prague for correction.

