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## The Arrest

Somebody must have defamed Josef K., for without having done anything wrong, he was arrested one morning. His landlady's cook, who always brought him breakfast at about eight o'clock, did not appear that day. This had never happened before. K. waited a while and looked from his pillow over to the old woman living opposite, who was watching him with unusual curiosity; but then, feeling both uneasy and hungry, he rang the bell. Immediately there was a knock on the door and a man he had never seen in the house before entered the room. He was slim but strongly built, and he wore a close-fitting black suit in the manner of travelling clothes, complete with various pleats, pockets, buckles, buttons and a belt, that looked extremely practical, even if one could not quite determine what purpose it served. "Who are you?" asked K., sitting up in his bed. But the man ignored his question, as if his presence needed no explanation, and merely said: "You rang?" "I want Anna to bring me my breakfast", said K., trying to figure out by silent scrutiny and logic who the visitor really was. Yet the man did not let himself be gazed at for long, but turned to the door and opened it to tell someone who was evidently right behind it: "He wants Anna to bring him his breakfast." A short guffaw came from the next room, but it was hard to tell from the sound if there was more than one person involved. Although the stranger could not have learned anything from this that he did not know already, he now said to K. in a formal tone: "It's not possible." "We'll see about that", cried K., as he leaped out of

bed and hastily put on his trousers. "I'd like to see who's there in the next room and what kind of explanation my landlady Frau Grubach can have for this intrusion." He realized right away that he should not have said this aloud, because by doing so he had to some extent acknowledged the stranger's right to supervise him. But it did not seem too important to him now. Yet the stranger seemed to take his words in that very sense, for he said: "Wouldn't you rather stay?" "I will neither stay nor let you talk to me, unless you introduce yourself." "I meant well", the man said and held the door open for K. now. The next room, which K. entered more slowly than he had intended, looked quite the same at first glance as it had done the night before. It was Frau Grubach's sitting room, and there might have been just a little more space this morning among all the furniture, blankets, china, and photographs, but that was not immediately apparent, mainly because the most important change was the presence of a man sitting at the open window with a book, from which he now looked up. "You ought to have stayed in your room! Didn't Franz tell you?" "What do you want?" said K., looking from this new acquaintance to the man referred to as Franz, who was still standing at the door, and back again. Through the open window the old woman came into view again, who, with the typical inquisitiveness of old age, had moved to the window opposite now, so she would not miss anything. "I want to see Frau Grubach ...", said K., and made a movement as if wrenching himself away from the two men, who were actually standing at some distance. As he proceeded to get out of the room, the man at the window said "no" and stood up, throwing his book on a table. "You are not allowed to leave. After all, you are under arrest." "So it would seem", said K. "And what for?" he asked then. "We have not come to tell you that. Go to

your room and wait. The proceedings have started, and you will learn everything in due course. I am exceeding my orders by talking to you so amicably. However, I hope nobody is listening except Franz, and he is behaving extremely friendly to you himself, against all regulations. If you continue to be as lucky as you have been in the designation of your warders, you can be quite confident." K. wanted to sit down, but he realized now there was nowhere to sit except in the chair by the window. "You will come to find out how true this is", said Franz, walking towards him together with the other man. The latter was considerably taller than K. and kept patting him on the shoulder. Both of them examined K.'s nightgown and told him he would have to wear a much plainer shirt now, but they would take care of this and the rest of his underwear and restore everything to him, if his case turned out favourably. "You better hand the clothes to us rather than to the depot", they said, "for things often get stolen at the depot, and besides, they sell all the clothes after a certain time, whether the proceedings have been finished or not. And cases like this do take a long time, especially these days. Of course you would get a sum of money from the depot in the long run, but these sums are already so small in the first place since the price depends more on the bribe than on an actual offer, and then we know how such sums tend to decrease, as they are passed from hand to hand over the years." K. did not pay much attention to these words; the right he possibly still had to dispose of his property was of little concern to him now; it was far more important to understand his position clearly, though in the presence of these people he could not really think; the second warder's stomach – for what could they be but warders – kept bumping into him in an almost affable way, but when he looked up he saw a dry and bony face with

a strongly bent big nose which was strangely at odds with this fat body and seemed to be conferring with the other warder above his head. What kind of people were these men? What were they talking about? What authority did they belong to? After all, K. lived in a legally constituted state, there was peace and the laws were established, so who dared to assail him in his own home? He had always been inclined to take things easy, to believe the worst only when he saw the worst happen and not to care about the future, even if things were looking bleak. But now this approach did not seem right. One could of course regard the whole affair as a joke, a crude joke that for some reason his colleagues at the bank had played on him, maybe because today was his thirtieth birthday, that was a possibility, and maybe all he had to do was to laugh in the warders' faces, and they would laugh with him; perhaps they were just porters picked off the street, they did look a little like that – all the same, ever since his first look at the warder Franz he was determined not to give away the slightest advantage he might have over these people. K. could not see much danger in the fact that people might say later he could not take a joke, but he recalled now – although he did not usually learn much from experience – certain incidents of little importance in themselves, when unlike his friends he had deliberately behaved recklessly without thinking of the consequences and had been punished by the outcome. This was not to happen again, not this time, if it was all just a farce, then he would play along.

He was still a free man. "Excuse me", he said, as he quickly went past the warders to his room. "He seems to be a reasonable fellow", he heard one warder say behind him. In his room he pulled out the drawers of his desk at once, everything was in perfect order there, but in his perturbed state, he could not at first



find the identity papers he was looking for. At last he found his bicycle licence and was about to take it to the warders, but then the paper seemed too insignificant, and he went on searching until he found his birth certificate. Just as he was on his way back into the next room, the opposite door opened, and Frau Grubach appeared. As soon as she saw K. she obviously was too embarrassed to enter, she excused herself and left, closing the door very carefully. "But do come in", K. just was able to say. Now he was standing in the middle of the room with his papers, still looking at the door, which did not open again, until a shout from the warders made him turn to see them sitting at the open window, devouring his breakfast. "Why didn't she come in?" he asked. "She is not allowed to", answered the tall warder. "You're under arrest, you see." "But how can I be under arrest? And in this fashion, too?" "Now you're starting again", said the warder, dipping his buttered bread into the honey jar. "We do not answer such questions." "You will have to answer them", said K. "Here are my identity papers, now show me yours, and first of all my arrest warrant." "Good God!" said the warder. "If you would just accept your position, instead of provoking us so pointlessly, us who are probably closer to you now than any other of your fellow men!" "That's true, you can believe it", said Franz, who was not raising the coffee cup he held in his hand to his mouth, but looked at K. with a lingering glance that was probably significant, but nevertheless incomprehensible. Without intending to, K. inadvertently found himself involved in an exchange of looks with Franz, but then he tapped on his papers emphatically and said: "Here are my identity papers." "What are they to us?" shouted the tall warder. "Your behaviour is worse than childish. What do you want? Are you trying to bring this confounded great trial of yours to an early

end by arguing with us, your warders, about identity and warrants? We are humble subordinates who have barely any knowledge of identity papers, and all we have to do with your case is to guard you for ten hours a day and get paid for it. That is all we are, but still we are capable of understanding that the high authorities we serve would not order an arrest like this unless they had exact information about the grounds for the arrest and about the arrested person. There can be no mistake about it. Our officials, as I know them, and I know only the lowest ranks, do not go searching for guilt among the people, but are drawn towards the guilty, as the law decrees, and must send us warders out. That's the law. How could there be any mistakes?" "I don't know this law", said K. "All the worse for you", said the warder. "It probably exists only in your imagination", said K.; he wanted to enter the warders' thoughts somehow, to turn them to his advantage or establish himself there. But the warder just said dismissively: "You will experience it." Franz joined in, saying: "See, Willem, he admits to not knowing the law, and yet he claims he's innocent." "You're quite right, but one cannot make him understand anything", said the other one. K. gave no further answer; must I, he thought, allow the prattle of these lowest of minions – and they themselves admit that's all they are – to confuse me even more? They do, after all, talk about things they don't understand. Their confidence is only made possible by their stupidity. A few words with someone equal to me will clarify things so much faster than the longest talk with these two. He walked up and down in the free space of the room, across the street he saw the old woman, who had dragged an even older man to the window and held on to him tightly. K. had to put an end to this show. "Take me to your superior officer", he said. "When he

tells us to; not before”, said the warder who had been addressed as Willem. “And now I advise you”, he added, “to go to your room, keep calm, and wait for whatever will be decreed about you. We advise you not to trouble yourself with vain thoughts, but to pull yourself together, great demands will be made on you. You have not treated us in the way our obliging manner would have deserved. You forgot that we, whatever we might be, are at least free men in comparison to you, and that is no small advantage. Still we are prepared, if you have the money, to fetch you a light breakfast from the café down the street.”

Without a reply to this offer, K. stood still for a moment. If he were to open the door into the next room or even the one into the hall, perhaps the two men would not dare to hold him back, perhaps the simplest solution of the whole business would be to push it to the extreme. But perhaps they would seize him still, and once he was down on the floor all superiority would be lost that he still retained over them in some sense. So he chose the safe solution that must come in the natural course of events, and went back into his room, without another word being said by him or by the warders.

He threw himself on his bed and took a fine apple from his washstand that he had put aside for breakfast the night before. Now it was all the breakfast he had, and it was, as he assured himself taking the first big bite, much better than any breakfast from the dirty night café he might have obtained through his warders’ mercy. He felt well and confident, of course he would be absent from his post at the bank this morning, but that could easily be excused due to the relatively high position he held there. Should he give the real reason? He intended to. If they did not believe him, which under the circumstances would be understandable, he could call Frau Grubach as

a witness, or even the old couple from across the street, who were probably on their way back to the window opposite his room. K. was amazed – at least he was when he tried to follow the warders’ train of thought – that they had urged him into his room and left him there on his own, when there was ample opportunity to kill himself. But at the same time he wondered, judging now from his own point of view, what reason he could have for doing such a thing. Because those two were sitting next door and had intercepted his breakfast? Killing himself would have been so senseless that even if he had wanted to, he would not have been able to do it because of its mere senselessness. Had the warders’ intellectual limits not been so obvious, one might have thought it was for the same reason that they had left him alone without seeing any danger in it. If they liked, they could watch as he went to his wall cupboard now, where he kept some good brandy and see him pour a first glass in place of breakfast and a second one to give him courage, the latter only as a precaution against the unlikely event that he might need it.

Then a shout from the next room startled him so much that his teeth struck the glass: “The inspector wants you!” It was just the yell that startled him, that brusque and cutting military yell he would not have thought the warder Franz capable of. The command itself was very welcome. “At last”, he called back and after locking the cupboard hurried straight into the next room. The two warders were standing there, driving him back into his room, as if this were understood. “What do you think you’re doing?” they cried, “you want to report to the inspector in your shirt? He will have you beaten, and us too!” “Leave me alone, damn you”, cried K., who had already been forced back to his wardrobe, “I’m being assailed in my bed, so I can’t be expected to wear my best suit,

can I?" "It's no use", the warders said and went quite calm or almost sad, as they did whenever K. was shouting, and thus confused him or rather brought him back to his senses. "Ridiculous formalities!" he grumbled, but he had already picked up a coat from the chair and was holding it in both hands as if submitting it to the warder for approval. They shook their heads. "It has to be a black coat", they said. K. threw his coat to the floor and said – not knowing himself what he meant by it: "But it's not the main hearing yet." The warders smiled but insisted, "It has to be a black coat." "If I can speed up the matter this way I don't mind", said K., and he opened the wardrobe, searched among his clothes for some time, chose his best black suit, a two-piece that had aroused his acquaintances' attention because of its cut, put on another shirt too, and began to dress carefully. Secretly he thought that he had managed to expedite the whole affair, since the warders forgot to make him take a bath. He observed them to see if they would remember after all, but of course it did not occur to them, although Willem did not forget to send Franz to the inspector with the message that K. was getting dressed.

When he was fully dressed he had to march in front of Willem through the empty room and past the next door into the adjoining room, the double door of which had already been opened. This room had, as K. knew for sure, recently been rented by a certain Fräulein Bürstner, a typist who usually went to work very early, came back late, and had exchanged little more than a greeting with K. Now the bedside table had been moved from her bed to the middle of the room to serve as an interrogation desk, with the inspector sitting right behind it. He had crossed his legs, and one arm was draped across the back of his chair. In one corner of the room stood three young men who were

looking at Fräulein Bürstner's photographs that were stuck into a wall mat. On the latch of the open window a white blouse was hanging. In the window across the street, the old couple was stationed again, but now their party had increased in size, for behind them a man with an open shirt was towering, squeezing and twisting his reddish pointed beard.

"Josef K.?" asked the inspector, perhaps only to draw K's distracted glance to himself. K. nodded. "You were taken by surprise by this morning's events then?" the inspector asked, rearranging with both hands the few items on the bedside table, a candle with matches, a book, and a pincushion, as if these were things he required for the interrogation. "Certainly", said K., and he was filled with the pleasure of standing face to face with a reasonable man at last and being able to discuss his case with him, "certainly I am surprised, but I am by no means very surprised." "Not very surprised?" asked the inspector, placing the candle in the middle of the table now and grouping the other items around it. "Perhaps you misunderstand me", K. hastened to remark. "I mean ..." Here K. paused and looked around for a chair. "I may sit down, I suppose?" he asked. "It's not customary" replied the inspector. "I mean", K. said without further delay, "I am actually very surprised, but when one has spent thirty years in this world and has had to struggle on all alone, as I have, one becomes inured to surprises and doesn't take them too hard. Especially not one like today's." "Why especially not one like today's?" "I'm not saying I regard the whole thing as a joke, all these arrangements that have been made seem too extensive for that. Everyone in this boarding-house would have to be involved in it, and all of you too; that would be going beyond the limits of a joke. So I'm not saying it's a joke." "Quite right", said the inspector and looked down to see how many matches

were in the matchbox. "But on the other hand", K. went on, turning to all of them now and wishing he had the attention of the three men standing by the photographs too, "on the other hand, the matter cannot be of great consequence either. I assume this, because I am being charged but cannot find the slightest grounds for any accusation. Still, this is also beside the point, the main question is: who is accusing me? What authority is in charge of the proceedings? Are you officials? None of you wears a uniform, if I am not to call your attire" – and here he turned to Franz – "a uniform, but it's more of a travelling outfit. I demand clear answers to these questions, and I am convinced that after a clarification we shall be able to part most amicably." The inspector threw the matchbox down on the table. "You are gravely mistaken", he said. "These gentlemen and I are hardly of any importance for your case, in fact we know almost nothing about it. We could have been wearing the most official uniforms, and still your case would not be any worse. I am unable to tell you that you are being charged, nor do I know if you are indeed. You are under arrest, that is correct, and it is all I know. Perhaps the warders have hinted at anything else, but that was nothing but idle talk then. So even if I cannot answer your questions, I can however advise you to think less about us and about what is going to happen to you and to think more about yourself. And don't make such a fuss about your feelings of innocence, it spoils the otherwise not unfavourable impression you make. Also, you should restrain your way of talking, almost anything you said earlier could have been deduced from your behaviour, only a few words would have been necessary, and besides it was nothing that could do you great credit."

K. stared at the inspector. So he was being lectured like a schoolboy by a man who might be younger

than himself? His frankness was punished with a reprimand? And he wasn't going to learn anything about the reason for his arrest or about those who ordered it? He was seized by a certain agitation, walked up and down without being stopped, pushed back his cuffs, felt his chest, smoothed his hair, went past the three men, saying "it's no use", whereupon the three turned to him and looked at him in an affable but serious manner, and finally came to a halt in front of the inspector's desk. "Public prosecutor Hasterer is a good friend of mine", he said, "can I phone him?" "Of course", said the inspector, "but I cannot see the point in that, unless you have some private matter to discuss with him." "Cannot see the point?" cried K., more perturbed than annoyed. "Who are you? You're asking for a point and yet you are giving the most pointless argument yourself! Isn't it enough to make one weep? First these gentlemen assail me, and now they are sitting or standing around and watch me perform tricks for you. What point is there in phoning an attorney when I am supposedly under arrest? Well, I will not phone him." "But do", said the inspector, waving his hand to the hall where the telephone was, "please do phone him." "No, I don't want to anymore", said K. and went over to the window. In the window opposite, the group was still watching, and only now that K. had come to the window they seemed a little disturbed in their quiet surveillance. The old people started to get up, but the man in the background reassured them. "There are some more spectators over there", K. cried out to the inspector, pointing his finger. "Get away from there", he called across. Immediately, all three moved back a few steps, and the old people even retreated behind the man, whose massive body shielded them and who, judging from his lip movements, seemed to be saying something that could not be heard at that distance. But



they did not disappear altogether and rather seemed to wait for the right moment to come back to the window again without being noticed. "Impertinent, bad-mannered people!" said K. as he turned back to the room. It was possible that the inspector agreed with him, as K. believed to have detected with a sideways glance. But it was just as possible that he had not been listening at all, for he pressed one hand firmly on the table and appeared to be comparing the fingers' lengths. The two warders were sitting on a chest covered with an embroidered cloth, rubbing their knees. The three young men had put their hands on their hips and stood looking around aimlessly. It was as quiet as in some abandoned office. "Well, gentlemen", cried K., and for a moment he felt as if he were carrying them all on his shoulders, "judging from the look of you, this case of mine must be over. In my opinion, the best thing to do is not to ponder any further on whether your action was justified or not, but to bring this affair to an amicable end by shaking hands. If you agree, then please ..." He went up to the inspector's desk and held out his hand. Gnawing on his lips, the inspector raised his eyes and gazed at K.'s outstretched hand; K. still believed the inspector was going to take it. But the man rose to his feet, picked up a hard round hat from Fräulein Bürstner's bed and carefully placed it on his head, as one does when trying on new hats. "How simple everything seems to you!" he said to K. "We ought to bring this affair to an amicable end, you think? No, no, that's really not possible. By which I definitely do not mean you should give up hope. No, why should you? You are just under arrest, that's all. This is what I had to tell you, I have done so, and I have also witnessed your reaction. That will be all for today, and we can take our leave, if just for the moment. You will want to go to the bank now, I presume?"



"To the bank?" asked K. "I thought I was under arrest." K. was asking with a certain defiance, for although his handshake had not been accepted, he felt more and more independent of all these people, particularly since the inspector had stood up. He was playing with them. If they left, he planned on running after them as far as the gate, offering to be arrested. So he repeated: "How can I go to the bank when I'm under arrest?" "I see", said the inspector, who had already reached the door, "you've misunderstood me. That you are under arrest should not prevent you from fulfilling your duties. Nor will you be held back from going on with your life as usual." "Then being arrested is not so bad", said K. and went up close to the inspector. "I never meant anything else", said the latter. "But it would seem it was not even very necessary to tell me about my arrest", said K. and went up even closer. The others had come nearer too. They all had gathered in a small space by the door. "It was my duty", said the inspector. "A stupid duty", said K. harshly. "Maybe", replied the inspector, "but we don't want to waste our time with talk like this. I had assumed you would want to go to the bank. Since you are paying so much attention to every word I say, I will add: I'm not forcing you to go to the bank, I merely assumed you would want to. And to make this easier for you and render your arrival at the bank as inconspicuous as possible, I arranged for these three gentlemen, your colleagues, to be at here your disposal." "What?" cried K. and looked at the three men in amazement. These utterly insipid and anaemic young men, whom he remembered merely as the group by the photographs, were indeed clerks from his bank; not colleagues, that would not have been correct, which revealed a gap in the inspector's omniscience, but still, they were subordinate clerks from the bank. How could K. have failed to notice

that? How absorbed he must have been in the inspector and the warders not to recognize these three. Erect and formal Rabensteiner, swinging his hands, fair-haired Kullych with his deep-set eyes, and Kaminer with his insufferable smile caused by a chronic muscle spasm. "Good morning", said K. after a while and gave his hand to the men, who were bowing formally. "I didn't recognize you. Now, we'll set off to work, won't we?" The gentlemen nodded and laughed eagerly, as if they had been waiting for this the whole time, but when K. missed his hat, which had been left in his room, they all went after the other to fetch it, indicating a certain embarrassment. K. stood still and watched them through the two open doors, last to come of course was lethargic Rabensteiner who had just broken into an elegant trot. Kaminer handed him his hat and K., as he had often found it necessary at the bank before, had to remind himself that Kaminer's smile was not intentional, that he was indeed not even able to smile voluntarily. Then Frau Grubach, looking not particularly guilty, opened the door in the hall for all of them and, as usual, K. found himself looking down at her apron strings which cut into her massive body more deeply than necessary. Outside K., with his watch in hand, decided on taking a taxi to avoid any further delay since he was already half an hour late. Kaminer ran to the corner to get the taxi while the other two were obviously trying to divert K., when suddenly Kullych pointed at the house opposite, where the big man with the reddish pointed beard had appeared. A little embarrassed at first for being seen in his full height, he retreated and leaned against the wall. The old couple was probably still on the stairs. K. was annoyed with Kullych for drawing attention to the man, whom he had already noticed earlier and had even expected. "Don't look there", he burst out, not realizing

how extraordinary such a remark must seem when addressed to adult men. But no explanation was called for, as the taxi arrived just then and they took their seats and drove off. Then K. remembered that he had not seen the inspector and the warders leave; the inspector had hidden the three clerks from him, and now the clerks had done the same for the inspector. This did not say much for his presence of mind, and K. was determined to pay more attention from now on. Yet he still turned instinctively around and leaned over the back of the taxi to see if he could detect the inspector and the warders anywhere. But he promptly turned back again without even trying to look for anyone and settled himself comfortably into his corner. Despite appearances, he would have been glad of some words of encouragement now, but the gentlemen seemed tired now, Rabensteiner was looking out to the right, Kullich to the left, just Kaminer offered his grin, about which unfortunately human decency forbade any jokes.

## Conversation with Frau Grubach Then Fräulein Bürstner

This spring K. had usually spent his evenings going for a short walk after work, if it was possible – he stayed in his office most days until nine o'clock – alone, or with acquaintances, and then going to a beer cellar where he would sit at a table for regulars, with some older gentlemen, until eleven o'clock. But there were exceptions to this arrangement, for example when K. was invited by the bank manager, who greatly valued his diligence and trustworthiness, for a ride in his car or to dine at his villa. And once a week K. went to see a girl called Elsa, who worked as a waitress in a wine tavern all night and in the daytime received her visitors in bed.

This evening, however – the day had passed quickly with a lot of hard work and many complimentary and friendly birthday wishes – K. wanted go straight home. During every brief pause in the day's work he had been thinking about this; without knowing exactly why, he felt as if the morning's events had caused a substantial disorder in Frau Grubach's whole house and that it was really up to him to restore order. Once this order was restored, every trace of these events would be eradicated and everything would resume its usual course. There was nothing to be feared in particular from the three clerks, they had sunk back into the vast workforce of the bank and did not seem changed in any way. K. had called them to his office several times, individually and all together, with no other purpose than to observe them; each time he had dismissed them with a quiet mind.