

*The Arrest - Conversation with Frau
Grubach then Fräulein Bürstner*

SOMEONE must have been telling lies about Joseph K., for without having done anything wrong he was arrested one fine morning. His landlady's cook, who always brought him his breakfast at eight o'clock, failed to appear on this occasion. That had never happened before. K. waited for a little while longer, watching from his pillow the old lady opposite, who seemed to be peering at him with a curiosity unusual even for her, but then, feeling both put out and hungry, he rang the bell. At once there was a knock at the door and a man entered whom he had never seen before in the house. He was slim and yet well knit, he wore a closely fitting black suit, which was furnished with all sorts of pleats, pockets, buckles, and buttons, as well as a belt, like a tourist's outfit, and in consequence looked eminently practical, though one could not quite tell what actual purpose it served. 'Who are you?' asked K., half raising himself in bed. But the man ignored the question, as though his appearance needed no explanation, and merely said: 'Did you ring?' 'Anna is to bring me my breakfast,' said K., and then with silent intensity studied the fellow, trying to make out who he could be. The man did not submit to this scrutiny for very long, but turned to the door and opened it slightly so as to report to someone who was evidently standing just behind it: 'He says Anna is to bring him his breakfast.' A short guffaw from the next room came in answer; one

could not tell from the sound whether it was produced by several individuals or merely by one. Although the strange man could not have learned anything from it that he did not know already, he now said to K., as if passing on a statement: 'It can't be done.' 'This is news indeed,' cried K., springing out of bed and quickly pulling on his trousers. 'I must see what people these are next door, and how Frau Grubach can account to me for such behaviour.' Yet it occurred to him at once that he should not have said this aloud and that by doing so he had in a way admitted the stranger's right to an interest in his actions; still, that did not seem important to him at the moment. The stranger, however, took his words in some such sense, for he asked: 'Hadh't you better stay here?' 'I shall neither stay here nor let you address me until you have introduced yourself.' 'I meant well enough,' said the stranger, and then of his own accord threw the door open. In the next room, which K. entered more slowly than he had intended, everything looked at first glance almost as it had done the evening before. It was Frau Grubach's living-room; perhaps among all the furniture, rugs, china, and photographs with which it was crammed there was a little more free space than usual, yet one did not perceive that at first, especially as the main change consisted in the presence of a man who was sitting at the open window reading a book, from which he now glanced up. 'You should have stayed in your room! Didn't Franz tell you that?' 'Yes, yes, but what are you doing here?' asked K., looking from his new acquaintance to the man called Franz, who was still standing by the door, and then back again. Through the open window he had another glimpse of the old woman, who with truly senile inquisitiveness had moved along to the window exactly opposite, in order

to see all that could be seen. 'I'd better get Frau Grubach —' said K., as if wrenching himself away from the two men (though they were standing at quite a distance from him) and making as if to go out. 'No,' said the man at the window, flinging the book down on the table and getting up. 'You can't go out, you are arrested.' 'So it seems,' said K. 'But what for?' he added. 'We are not authorized to tell you that. Go to your room and wait there. Proceedings have been instituted against you, and you will be informed of everything in due course. I am exceeding my instructions in speaking freely to you like this. But I hope nobody hears me except Franz, and he himself has been too free with you, against his express instructions. If you continue to have as good luck as you have had in the choice of your warders, then you can be confident of the final result.' K. felt he must sit down, but now he saw that there was no seat in the whole room except the chair beside the window. 'You'll soon discover that we're telling you the truth,' said Franz, advancing towards him simultaneously with the other man. The latter overtopped K. enormously and kept clapping him on the shoulder. They both examined his nightshirt and said that he would have to wear a less fancy shirt now, but that they would take charge of this one and the rest of his underwear and, if his case turned out well, restore them to him later. 'Much better give these things to us than hand them over to the depot,' they said, 'for in the depot there's lots of thieving, and besides they sell everything there after a certain length of time, no matter whether your case is settled or not. And you never know how long these cases will last, especially these days. Of course you would get the money out of the depot in the long run, but in the first place the prices they pay you

are always wretched, for they sell your things to the best briber, not the best bidder, and anyhow it's well known that money dwindles a lot if it passes from hand to hand from one year to another.' K. paid hardly any attention to this advice, any right to dispose of his own things which he might possess he did not prize very highly; far more important to him was the necessity to understand his situation clearly; but with these people beside him he could not even think, the belly of the second warder — for they could only be warders — kept butting against him in an almost friendly way, yet if he looked up he caught sight of a face which did not in the least suit that fat body, a dry, bony face with a great nose, twisted to one side, which seemed to be consulting over his head with the other warder. Who could these men be? What were they talking about? What authority could they represent? K. lived in a country with a legal constitution, there was universal peace, all the laws were in force; who dared seize him in his own dwelling? He had always been inclined to take things easily, to believe in the worst only when the worst happened, to take no care for the morrow even when the outlook was threatening. But that struck him as not being the right policy here, one could certainly regard the whole thing as a joke, a rude joke which his colleagues in the Bank had concocted for some unknown reason, perhaps because this was his thirtieth birthday, that was of course possible, perhaps he had only to laugh knowingly in these men's faces and they would laugh with him, perhaps they were merely porters from the street corner — they looked very like it — nevertheless his very first glance at the man Franz had decided him for the time being not to give away any advantage that he might possess over these people. There was a slight risk that

later on his friends might possibly say he could not take a joke, but he had in mind — though it was not usual with him to learn from experience — several occasions, of no importance in themselves, when against all his friends' advice he had behaved with deliberate recklessness and without the slightest regard for possible consequences, and had had in the end to pay dearly for it. That must not happen again, at least not this time; if this was a comedy he would insist on playing it to the end.

But he was still free. 'Allow me,' he said, passing quickly between the warders to his room. 'He seems to have some sense,' he heard one of them saying behind him. When he reached his room he at once pulled out the drawer of his desk, everything lay there in perfect order, but in his agitation he could not find at first the identification papers for which he was looking. At last he found his bicycle licence and was about to start off with it to the warders, but then it seemed too trivial a thing, and he searched again until he found his birth certificate. As he was re-entering the next room the opposite door opened and Frau Grubach showed herself. He saw her only for an instant, for no sooner did she recognize him than she was obviously overcome by embarrassment, apologized for intruding, vanished, and shut the door again with the utmost care. 'Come in, do,' he would just have had time to say. But he merely stood holding his papers in the middle of the room, looking at the door, which did not open again, and was only recalled to attention by a shout from the warders, who were sitting at a table by the open window and, as he now saw, devouring his breakfast. 'Why didn't she come in?' he asked. 'She isn't allowed to,' said the tall warder, 'since you're under arrest.' 'But how can I be under arrest? And particularly in such a ridiculous

fashion?' 'So now you're beginning it all over again?' said the warder, dipping a slice of bread and butter into the honey-pot. 'We don't answer such questions.' 'You'll have to answer them,' said K. 'Here are my papers, now show me yours, and first of all your warrant for arresting me.' 'Oh, good Lord,' said the warder. 'If you would only realize your position, and if you wouldn't insist on uselessly annoying us two, who probably mean better by you and stand closer to you than any other people in the world.' 'That's so, you can believe that,' said Franz, not raising to his lips the coffee-cup he held in his hand, but instead giving K. a long, apparently significant, yet incomprehensible look. Without wishing it K. found himself decoyed into an exchange of speaking looks with Franz, none the less he tapped his papers and repeated: 'Here are my identification papers.' 'What are your papers to us?' cried the tall warder. 'You're behaving worse than a child. What are you after? Do you think you'll bring this fine case of yours to a speedier end by wrangling with us, your warders, over papers and warrants? We are humble subordinates who can scarcely find our way through a legal document and have nothing to do with your case except to stand guard over you for ten hours a day and draw our pay for it. That's all we are, but we're quite capable of grasping the fact that the high authorities we serve, before they would order such an arrest as this must be quite well informed about the reasons for the arrest and the person of the prisoner. There can be no mistake about that. Our officials, so far as I know them, and I know only the lowest grades among them, never go hunting for crime in the populace, but, as the Law decrees, are drawn towards the guilty and must then send out us warders. That is the Law. How could there be a mistake in that?'

'I don't know this Law,' said K. 'All the worse for you,' replied the warder. 'And it probably exists nowhere but in your own head,' said K.; he wanted in some way to enter into the thoughts of the warders and twist them to his own advantage or else try to acclimatize himself to them. But the warder merely said in a discouraging voice: 'You'll come up against it yet.' Franz interrupted: 'See, Willem, he admits that he doesn't know the Law and yet he claims he's innocent.' 'You're quite right, but you'll never make a man like that see reason,' replied the other. K. gave no further answer; 'Must I,' he thought, 'let myself be confused still worse by the gabble of those wretched hirelings? — they admit themselves that's all they are. They're talking of things, in any case, which they don't understand. Plain stupidity is the only thing that can give them such assurance. A few words with a man on my own level of intelligence would make everything far clearer than hours of talk with these two.' He walked up and down a few times in the free part of the room; at the other side of the street he could still see the old woman, who had now dragged to the window an even older man, whom she was holding round the waist. K. felt he must put an end to this farce. 'Take me to your superior officer,' he said. 'When he orders me, not before,' retorted the warder called Willem. 'And now I advise you,' he went on, 'to go to your room, stay quietly there, and wait for what may be decided about you. Our advice to you is not to let yourself be distracted by vain thoughts, but to collect yourself, for great demands will be made upon you. You haven't treated us as our kind advances to you deserved, you have forgotten that we, no matter who we may be, are at least free men compared to you; that is no small advantage. All the same, we are prepared, if you have any

money, to bring you a little breakfast from the coffee-house across the street.'

Without replying to this offer K. remained standing where he was for a moment. If he were to open the door of the next room or even the door leading to the hall, perhaps the two of them would not dare to hinder him, perhaps that would be the simplest solution of the whole business, to bring it to a head. But perhaps they might seize him after all, and if he were once down, all the superiority would be lost which in a certain sense he still retained. Accordingly, instead of a quick solution he chose that certainty which the natural course of things would be bound to bring, and went back to his room without another word having been said by him or by the warders.

He flung himself on his bed and took from the washstand a fine apple which he had laid out the night before for his breakfast. Now it was all the breakfast he would have, but in any case, as the first few bites assured him, much better than the breakfast from the filthy night café would have been, which the grace of his warders might have secured him. He felt fit and confident, he would miss his work in the Bank that morning, it was true, but that would be easily overlooked, considering the comparatively high post he held there. Should he give the real reason for his absence? He considered doing so. If they did not believe him, which in the circumstances would be understandable, he could produce Frau Grubach as a witness, or even the two odd creatures over the way, who were now probably meandering back again to the window opposite his room. K. was surprised, at least he was surprised considering the warders' point of view, that they had sent him to his room and left him alone there, where

he had abundant opportunities to take his life. Though at the same time he also asked himself, looking at it from his own point of view, what possible ground he could have to do so. Because two warders were sitting next door and had intercepted his breakfast? To take his life would be such a senseless act that, even if he wished, he could not bring himself to do it because of its very senselessness. If the intellectual poverty of the warders were not so manifest, he might almost assume that they too saw no danger in leaving him alone, for the very same reason. They were quite at liberty to watch him now while he went to a wall-cupboard where he kept a bottle of good brandy, while he filled a glass and drank it down to make up for his breakfast, and then drank a second to give him courage, the last one only as a precaution, for the improbable contingency that it might be needed.

Then a shout came from the next room which made him start so violently that his teeth rattled against the glass. 'The Inspector wants you,' was its tenor. It was merely the tone of it that startled him, a curt, military bark with which he would never have credited the warder Franz. The command itself was actually welcome to him. 'At last,' he shouted back, closing the cupboard and hurrying at once into the next room. There the two warders were standing, and, as if that were a matter of course, immediately drove him back into his room again. 'What are you thinking of?' they cried. 'Do you imagine you can appear before the Inspector in your shirt? He'll have you well thrashed, and us too.' 'Let me alone, damn you,' cried K., who by now had been forced back to his wardrobe. 'If you grab me out of bed, you can't expect to find me all dressed up in my best suit.' 'This doesn't help you any,' said the warders, who as soon as K. raised his voice

always grew quite calm, indeed almost rueful, and thus contrived either to confuse him or to some extent bring him to his senses. 'Silly formalities!' he growled, but immediately lifted a coat from a chair and held it up for a little while in both hands, as if displaying it to the warders for their approval. They shook their heads. 'It must be a black coat,' they said. Thereupon K. flung the coat on the floor and said — he did not himself know in what sense he meant the words — 'But this isn't the capital charge yet.' The warders smiled, but stuck to their: 'It must be a black coat.' 'If it's to dispatch my case any quicker, I don't mind,' replied K., opening the wardrobe, where he searched for a long time among his many suits, chose his best black one, a lounge suit which had caused almost a sensation among his acquaintances because of its elegance, then selected another shirt and began to dress with great care. In his secret heart he thought he had managed after all to speed up the proceedings, for the warders had forgotten to make him take a bath. He kept an eye on them to see if they would remember the ducking, but of course it never occurred to them, yet on the other hand Willem did not forget to send Franz to the Inspector with the information that K. was dressing.

When he was fully dressed he had to walk, with Willem treading on his heels, through the next room, which was now empty, into the adjoining one, whose double doors were flung open. This room, as K. knew quite well, had recently been taken by a Fräulein Bürstner, a typist, who went very early to work, came home late, and with whom he had exchanged little more than a few words in passing. Now the night-table beside her bed had been pushed into the middle of the floor to serve as a desk, and the Inspec-

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

In a corner of the room three young men were standing looking at Fräulein Bürstner's photographs, which were stuck into a mat hanging on the wall. A white blouse dangled from the latch of the open window. In the window over the way the two old creatures were again stationed, but they had enlarged their party, for behind them, towering head and shoulders above them, stood a man with a shirt open at the neck and a reddish, pointed beard, which he kept pinching and twisting with his fingers. 'Joseph K.?' asked the Inspector, perhaps merely to draw K.'s distracted glance upon himself. K. nodded. 'You are presumably very surprised at the events of this morning?' asked the Inspector, with both hands rearranging the few things that lay on the night-table, a candle and a matchbox, a book and a pin-cushion, as if they were objects which he required for his interrogation. 'Certainly,' said K., and he was filled with pleasure at having encountered a sensible man at last, with whom he could discuss the matter. 'Certainly, I am surprised, but I am by no means very surprised.' 'Not very surprised?' asked the Inspector, setting the candle in the middle of the table and then grouping the other things round it. 'Perhaps you misunderstand me,' K. hastened to add. 'I mean' — here K. stopped and looked round him for a chair. 'I suppose I may sit down?' he asked. 'It's not usual,' answered the Inspector. 'I mean,' said K. without further parley, 'that I am very surprised, of course, but when one has lived for thirty years in this world and had to fight one's way through it, as I have had to do, one becomes hardened to surprises and doesn't take them too seriously. Particularly the one this morning.' 'Why particularly the one this

morning?' 'I won't say that I regard the whole thing as a joke, for the preparations that have been made seem too elaborate for that. The whole staff of the boarding-house would have to be involved, as well as all you people, and that would be past a joke. So I don't say that it's a joke.' 'Quite right,' said the Inspector, looking to see how many matches there were in the matchbox. 'But on the other hand, K. went on, turning to everybody there, he wanted to bring in the three young men standing beside the photographs as well, 'on the other hand, it can't be an affair of any great importance either. I argue this from the fact that though I am accused of something, I cannot recall the slightest offence that might be charged against me. But that even is of minor importance, the real question is, who accuses me? What authority is conducting these proceedings? Are you officers of the Law? None of you has a uniform, unless your suit' - here he turned to Franz - 'is to be considered a uniform, but it's more like a tourist's outfit. I demand a clear answer to these questions, and I feel sure that after an explanation we shall be able to part from each other on the best of terms.' The Inspector flung the matchbox down on the table. 'You are labouring under a great delusion,' he said. 'These gentlemen here and myself have no standing whatever in this affair of yours, indeed we know hardly anything about it. We might wear the most official uniforms and your case would not be a penny the worse. I can't even confirm that you are charged with an offence, or rather I don't know whether you are. You are under arrest, certainly, more than that I do not know. Perhaps the warders have given you a different impression, but they are only irresponsible gossips. However, if I can't answer your questions, I can at least give you a piece of advice; think less about us and

of what is going to happen to you, think more about yourself instead. And don't make such an outcry about your feeling innocent, it spoils the not unfavourable impression you make in other respects. Also you should be far more reticent, nearly everything you have just said could have been implied in your behaviour with the help of a word here and there, and in any case does not redound particularly to your credit.'

K. stared at the Inspector. Was he to be taught lessons in manners by a man probably younger than himself? To be punished for his frankness by a rebuke? And about the cause of his arrest and about its instigator was he to learn nothing?

He was thrown into a certain agitation, and began to walk up and down - nobody hindered him - pushed back his cuffs, fingered his shirt-front, ruffled his hair, and as he passed the three young men said: 'This is sheer nonsense!' Whereupon they turned towards him and regarded him sympathetically but gravely; at last he came to a stand before the Inspector's table. 'The advocate Hasterer is a personal friend of mine,' he said. 'May I telephone to him?' 'Certainly,' replied the Inspector, 'but I don't see what sense there would be in that, unless you have some private business of your own to consult him about.' 'What sense would there be in that?' cried K., more in amazement than exasperation. 'What kind of man are you, then? You ask me to be sensible and you carry on in the most senseless way imaginable yourself! It's enough to drive me mad. People first fall upon me in my own house and then lounge about the room and leave me to rack my brains in vain for the reason. What sense would there be in telephoning to an advocate when I'm supposed to be under arrest? All right, I won't telephone.'

'But do telephone if you want to,' replied the Inspector, waving an arm towards the entrance hall, where the telephone was, 'please do telephone.' 'No, I don't want to now,' said K., going over to the window. Across the street the party of three were still on the watch, and their enjoyment of the spectacle received its first slight check when K. appeared at the window. The two old people moved as if to get up, but the man at the back blandly reassured them. 'Here's a fine crowd of spectators!' cried K. in a loud voice to the Inspector, pointing at them with his finger. 'Go away,' he shouted across. The three of them immediately retreated a few steps, the two ancients actually took cover behind the younger man, who shielded them with his massive body and to judge from the movements of his lips was saying something which, owing to the distance, could not be distinguished. Yet they did not remove themselves altogether, but seemed to be waiting for the chance to return to the window again unobserved. 'Officious, inconsiderate wretches!' said K. as he turned back to the room again. The Inspector was possibly of the same mind, K. fancied, as far as he could tell from a hasty side-glance. But it was equally possible that the Inspector had not even been listening, for he had pressed one hand firmly on the table and seemed to be comparing the length of his fingers. The two warders sat on a chest draped with an embroidered cloth, rubbing their knees. The three young men were looking aimlessly round them with their hands on their hips. It was as quiet as in some deserted office. 'Come, gentlemen,' cried K., it seemed to him for the moment as if he were responsible for all of them, 'from the look of you this affair of mine seems to be settled. In my opinion the best thing now would be to bother no more about the justice or injustice of your be-

haviour and settle the matter amicably by shaking hands on it. If you are of the same opinion, why, then —' and he stepped over to the Inspector's table and held out his hand. The Inspector raised his eyes, bit his lips, and looked at K.'s hand stretched out to him; K. still believed he was going to close with the offer. But instead he got up, seized a hard round hat lying on Fräulein Bürstner's bed, and with both hands put it carefully on his head, as if he were trying it on for the first time. 'How simple it all seems to you!' he said to K. as he did so. 'You think we should settle the matter amicably, do you? No, no, that really can't be done. On the other hand I don't mean to suggest that you should give up hope. Why should you? You are only under arrest, nothing more. I was requested to inform you of this. I have done so, and I have also observed your reactions. That's enough for to-day, and we can say good-bye, though only for the time being, naturally. You'll be going to the Bank now, I suppose?' 'To the Bank?' asked K. 'I thought I was under arrest?' K. asked the question with a certain defiance, for though his offer to shake hands had been ignored, he felt more and more independent of all these people, especially now that the Inspector had risen to his feet. He was playing with them. He considered the idea of running after them to the front door as they left and challenging them to take him prisoner. So he said again: 'How can I go to the Bank, if I am under arrest?' 'Ah, I see,' said the Inspector, who had already reached the door. 'You have misunderstood me. You are under arrest, certainly, but that need not hinder you from going about your business. You won't be hampered in carrying on in the ordinary course of your life.' 'Then being arrested isn't so very bad,' said K., going up to the Inspector. 'I never suggested that it

was,' said the Inspector. 'But in that case it would seem there was no particular necessity to tell me about it,' said K., moving still closer. The others had drawn near too. They were all gathered now in a little space beside the door. 'It was my duty,' said the Inspector. 'A stupid duty,' said K. inflexibly. 'That may be,' replied the Inspector, 'but we needn't waste our time with such arguments. I was assuming that you would want to go to the Bank. As you are such a quibbler over words, let me add that I am not forcing you to go to the Bank, I was merely assuming that you would want to go. And to facilitate that, and render your arrival at the Bank as unobtrusive as possible, I have detained these three gentlemen here, who are colleagues of yours, to be at your disposal.' 'What?' cried K., gaping at the three of them. These insignificant anaemic young men, whom he had observed only as a group standing beside the photographs, were actually clerks in the Bank, not colleagues of his, that was putting it too strongly and indicated a gap in the omniscience of the Inspector, but they were subordinate employees of the Bank all the same. How could he have failed to notice that? He must have been very taken up with the Inspector and the warders not to recognize these three young men. The stiff Rabensteiner swinging his arms, the fair Kullich with the deep-set eyes, and Kamminer with his insupportable smile, caused by a chronic muscular twitch. 'Good morning!' said K. after a pause, holding out his hand to the three politely bowing figures. 'I didn't recognize you. Well, shall we go to our work now, eh?' The young men nodded, smiling and eagerly, as if they had been waiting all the time merely for this, but when K. turned to get his hat, which he had left in his room, they all fled one after the other to fetch it, which seemed to in-

dicate a certain embarrassment. K. stood still and watched them through the two open doors; the languid Rabensteiner, naturally, brought up the rear, for he merely minced along at an elegant trot. Kamminer handed over the hat and K. had to tell himself expressly, as indeed he had often to do in the Bank, that Kamminer's smile was not intentional, that the man could not smile intentionally if he tried. Then Frau Grubach, who did not appear to be particularly conscious of any guilt, opened the front door to let the whole company out, and K. glanced down, as so often before, at her apron-string, which made such an unreasonably deep cut in her massive body. Down below he decided, his watch in his hand, to take a taxi so as to save any further delay in reaching the Bank, for he was already half an hour late. Kamminer ran to the corner to get a taxi, the other two were obviously doing their best to distract K., when suddenly Kullich pointed to the opposite house door, where the tall man with the reddish, pointed beard was emerging into sight, and immediately, a little embarrassed at showing himself in his full height, retreated against the wall and leaned there. The old couple must be still coming down the stairs. K. was annoyed at Kullich for drawing his attention to the man, whom he had already identified, indeed whom he had actually expected to see. 'Don't look across,' he said hurriedly, without noticing how strange it must seem to speak in that fashion to grown-up men. But no explanation proved necessary, for at that moment the taxi arrived, they took their seats, and drove off. Then K. remembered that he had not noticed the Inspector and the warders leaving, the Inspector had usurped his attention so that he did not recognize the three clerks, and the clerks in turn had made him oblivious of the Inspector.

That did not show much presence of mind, and K. resolved to be more careful in this respect. Yet in spite of himself he turned round and craned from the back of the car to see if he could perhaps catch sight of the Inspector and the warders. But he immediately turned away again and leaned back comfortably in the corner without even having attempted to distinguish one of them. Unlikely as it might seem, this was just the moment when he would have welcomed a few words from his companions, but the others seemed to be suddenly tired. Rabenstein gazed out to the right, Kullich to the left, and only Kammer faced him with his nervous grin, which, unfortunately, on grounds of humanity could not be made a subject of conversation.

That spring K. had been accustomed to pass his evenings in this way: after work whenever possible — he was usually in his office until nine — he would take a short walk, alone or with some of his colleagues, and then go to a beer hall, where until eleven he sat at a table patronized mostly by elderly men. But there were exceptions to this routine, when, for instance, the Manager of the Bank, who highly valued his diligence and reliability, invited him for a drive or for dinner at his villa. And once a week K. visited a girl called Elsa, who was on duty all night till early morning as a waitress in a cabaret and during the day received her visitors in bed.

But on this evening — the day had passed quickly, filled with pressing work and many flattering and friendly birthday wishes — K. resolved to go straight home. During every brief pause in the day's work he had kept this resolve in mind; without his quite knowing why, it seemed to him that the whole household of Frau Grubach had

been thrown into great disorder by the events of the morning and that it was his task alone to put it right again. Once order was restored, every trace of these events would be obliterated and things would resume their old course. From the three clerks themselves nothing was to be feared, they had been absorbed once more in the great hierarchy of the Bank, no change was to be remarked in them. K. had several times called them singly and collectively to his room, with no other purpose than to observe them: each time he had dismissed them again with a quiet mind.

When at half-past nine he arrived at the house where he lived he found a young lad in the street doorway, standing with his legs wide apart and smoking a pipe. 'Who are you?' K. asked at once, bringing his face close to the lad's; one could not see very well in the darkness of the entrance. 'I'm the house-porter's son, sir,' said the lad, taking the pipe from his mouth and stepping aside. 'The house-porter's son?' asked K., tapping his stick impatiently on the ground. 'Do you want anything, sir? Shall I fetch my father?' 'No, no,' said K., and his voice had a reassuring note, as if the lad had done something wrong but was to be forgiven. 'It's all right,' he said and went on, yet before he climbed the stair he turned round for another look.

He had intended to go straight to his room, but as he wanted to speak to Frau Grubach he stopped instead to knock at her door. She was sitting darning at a table, on which lay a heap of old stockings. K. excused himself awkwardly for knocking so late, but Frau Grubach was most cordial and would hear of no apology, she was always glad to have a talk with him, he knew very well that he was her best and most valued boarder. K. looked round

the room, it had reverted completely to its old state, the breakfast dishes which had stood that morning on the table by the window had apparently been cleared away. Women's hands are quickly effective, he thought. He himself might have smashed the dishes on the spot, but he certainly could never have quietly carried them away. He gazed at Frau Grubach with a certain gratitude. 'Why are you still working at this late hour?' he asked. They were both sitting at the table now, and from time to time K. buried one hand in the pile of stockings. 'There's a lot to do,' she said; 'during the day my time belongs to my boarders; for keeping my own things in order I have only the evenings.' 'I'm afraid I've been responsible for giving you extra work to-day.' 'How is that?' she asked, becoming more intent, the work resting in her lap. 'I mean the men who were here this morning.' 'Oh, that,' she said, resuming her composure, 'that didn't give me much to do.' K. looked on in silence while she took up her darning again. ('She seems surprised that I mentioned it,' he thought, 'she seems to think it not quite right that I should mention it. All the more need for me to do so. I couldn't mention it to anyone but this old woman.') 'It must certainly have made more work,' he said at last, 'but it won't happen again.' 'No, that can't happen again,' she said reassuringly, with an almost sorrowful smile. 'Do you really mean it?' asked K. 'Yes,' she said softly, 'and above all you mustn't take it too much to heart. Lots of things happen in this world! As you've spoken so frankly to me, Herr K., I may as well admit to you that I listened for a little behind the door and that the two warders told me a few things too. It's a matter of your happiness, and I really have that at heart, more perhaps than I should, for I am only your landlady.' Well, then, I heard a

few things, but I can't say that they were particularly bad. No. You are under arrest, certainly, but not as a thief is under arrest. If one's arrested as a thief, that's a bad business, but as for this arrest — It gives me the feeling of something very learned, forgive me if what I say is stupid, it gives me the feeling of something abstract which I don't understand, but which I don't need to understand either.

'What you've just said is by no means stupid, Frau Grubach, at least I'm partly of the same opinion, except that I judge the whole thing still more severely and consider this assignation of guilt to be not only abstract but a pure figment. I was taken by surprise, that was all. If immediately on wakening I had got up without troubling my head about Anna's absence and had come to you without regarding anyone who tried to bar my way, I could have breakfasted in the kitchen for a change and could have got you to bring me my clothes from my room; in short, if I had behaved sensibly, nothing further would have happened, all this would have been nipped in the bud. But one is so unprepared. In the Bank, for instance, I am always prepared, nothing of that kind could possibly happen to me there, I have my own attendant, the general telephone and the office telephone stand before me on my desk, people keep coming in to see me, clients and clerks, and above all, my mind is always on my work and so kept on the alert; it would be an actual pleasure to me if a situation like that cropped up in the Bank. Well, it's past history now and I didn't really intend to speak about it again, only I wanted to hear your judgement, the judgement of a sensible woman, and I am very glad we are in agreement. But now you must give me your hand on it, an agreement such as this must be confirmed with a handshake.'

'Will she take my hand? The Inspector wouldn't do it,' he thought, gazing at the woman with a different, a critical eye. She stood up because he had stood up, she was a little embarrassed, for she had not understood all that he had said. And because of her embarrassment she said something which she had not intended to say and which was, moreover, rather out of place. 'Don't take it so much to heart, Herr K.,' she said with tears in her voice, forgetting, naturally, to shake his hand. 'I had no idea that I was taking it to heart,' said K., suddenly tired and seeing how little it mattered whether she agreed with him or not.

At the door he asked: 'Is Fräulein Bürstner in?' 'No,' replied Frau Grubach, and in giving this dry piece of information she smiled with honest if belated sympathy. 'She's at the theatre. Do you want to ask her something? Shall I give her a message?' 'Oh, I just wanted a word or two with her.' 'I'm afraid I don't know when she will be back; when she goes to the theatre she's usually late.' 'It's of no consequence,' said K., turning to the door, his head sunk on his breast. 'I only wanted to apologize to her for having borrowed her room to-day.' 'That's quite unnecessary, Herr K., you are too scrupulous, the Fräulein knows nothing about it, she hasn't been back since early this morning, everything has been put back in its place again too, see for yourself.' And she opened the door of Fräulein Bürstner's room. 'Thanks, I believe you,' said K., but went in through the open door all the same. The moon shone softly into the dark chamber. As far as one could see everything was really in its proper place, and the blouse was no longer dangling from the latch of the window. The pillows on the bed looked strangely high, they were lying partly in the moonlight. 'The Fräulein often comes home late,' said K., looking at Frau Grubach

as if she were to blame for it. 'Young people are like that,' said Frau Grubach apologetically. 'Certainly, certainly,' said K., 'but it can go too far.' 'That it can,' said Frau Grubach, 'how right you are, Herr K.!' In this case especially, perhaps. I have no wish to speak ill of Fräulein Bürstner, she is a dear, good girl, kind, decent, punctual, industrious, I admire all these qualities in her, but one thing is undeniable, she should have more pride, should keep herself more to herself. This very month I have met her twice already on outlying streets, and each time with a different gentleman. It worries me, and as sure as I stand here, Herr K., I haven't told anybody but you, but I'm afraid there's no help for it, I shall have to talk to the Fräulein herself about it. Besides, it isn't the only thing that has made me suspicious of her.' 'You're quite on the wrong track,' said K., with a sudden fury which he was scarcely able to hide, 'and you have obviously misunderstood my remark about the Fräulein, it wasn't meant in that way. In fact I frankly warn you against saying anything to the Fräulein, you're quite mistaken, I know the Fräulein very well, there isn't a word of truth in what you say. But perhaps I'm going too far myself. I don't want to interfere, you can say what you like to her. Good night.' 'Good night, Herr K.,' said Frau Grubach imploringly, hurrying after him to his door, which he had already opened, 'I don't really mean to say anything to the Fräulein yet, of course I'll wait to see what happens before I do anything, you're the only one I've spoken to, in confidence. After all it must be to the interest of all my boarders that I try to keep my house respectable, and that is all I'm anxious about in this case.' 'Respectable!' cried K., through the chink of the door; 'if you want to keep your house respectable you'll have to begin by giving me

notice.' Then he shut the door and paid no attention to the faint knocking that ensued.

On the other hand, as he felt no desire to sleep, he resolved to stay awake and take the opportunity of noting at what hour Fräulein Bürstner returned. Perhaps when she did so it might still be possible, unsuitable though the hour was, to have a few words with her. As he lounged by the window and shut his tired eyes, he actually considered for a moment paying Frau Grubach out by persuading Fräulein Bürstner to give notice along with him. Yet he saw at once that this was an excessive reaction, and he began to suspect himself of wishing to change his lodgings because of that morning's events. Nothing could be more senseless, not to say useless and equivocal.

When he became weary of gazing out into the empty street he lay down on the sofa, after having slightly opened the door to the entrance hall, so that from where he was lying he might see at once anyone who came in. Until about eleven he lay quietly on the sofa smoking a cigar. But then he could not endure lying there any longer and took a step or two into the entrance hall, as if that would make Fräulein Bürstner come all the sooner. He felt no special desire to see her, he could not even remember exactly how she looked, but he wanted to talk to her now, and he was exasperated that her being so late should further disturb and derange the end of such a day. She was to blame, too, for the fact that he had not eaten any supper and that he had put off the visit to Elsa he had proposed making that evening. He could remedy both omissions still, it was true, by going straight to the wine restaurant where Elsa worked. He would do that later, he decided, after his talk with Fräulein Bürstner.

It was a little after half-past eleven when he heard

somebody on the stairs. Absorbed in his thoughts, he had been marching up and down the entrance hall for some time as if it were his own room, and now he fled behind his bedroom door. It was Fräulein Bürstner coming in. As she locked the front door she shivered and drew her silk shawl round her slim shoulders. In a minute she would be going into her room, where K. certainly could not intrude at such an hour; he would therefore have to speak to her now, but unfortunately he had forgotten to switch on the light in his room, so that if he were to emerge out of the darkness it would look as if he were waylaying her and at least must be somewhat alarming. No time was to be lost, so in his confusion he whispered through the chink of the door: 'Fräulein Bürstner.' It sounded like a prayer, not like a summons. 'Is anyone there?' asked Fräulein Bürstner, looking round with wide-open eyes. 'It's I,' said K., stepping forward. 'Oh, Herr K.!' said Fräulein Bürstner, smiling. 'Good evening,' and she held out her hand to him. 'I should like to have a word or two with you, will you allow me to do so now?' 'Now?' asked Fräulein Bürstner. 'Must it be now?' A little unusual, isn't it?' 'I've been waiting for you ever since nine.' 'Well, I was at the theatre, you know, I had no idea you were waiting.' 'What I want to talk to you about didn't happen till to-day.' 'Oh, well, I have no serious objection, except that I am so tired I can scarcely stand on my feet. So come for a few minutes to my room. We can't possibly talk here, we should waken everybody, and I should loathe that for our own sakes even more than for theirs. Wait here till I have turned on the light in my room, and then you can switch off the light here.' K. did so, but waited until Fräulein Bürstner from her room again invited him, in a whisper, to come in. 'Take

a seat, she said, pointing to the sofa; she herself stood leaning against the foot of the bed in spite of her confessed weariness; she did not even take off her small but lavishly flower-bedecked hat. 'Well, what is it? I am really curious.' She crossed her ankles. 'Perhaps you will say,' began K., 'that there was no urgent need to speak about it now, but —' 'I never listen to preambles,' said Fräulein Bürstner. 'That makes it easier for me,' said K. 'This morning your room was thrown into some slight confusion and the fault was mine in a certain sense, it was done by strange people against my will, and yet as I have said the fault was mine; I want to beg your pardon for this.' 'My room?' asked Fräulein Bürstner, and she cast a critical eye round the room instead of looking at him. 'That is so,' said K., and now they gazed into each other's eyes for the first time. 'The actual manner in which it happened isn't worth mentioning.' 'But surely that's the really interesting part,' said Fräulein Bürstner. 'No,' said K. 'Well,' said Fräulein Bürstner, 'I don't want to pry into secrets; if you insist that it is uninteresting, I shall not argue the point. You have begged my pardon and I here-with freely grant it, particularly as I can find no trace of disturbance.' With her open palms pressed to her hips, she made a tour of the room. Beside the mat where the photographs were stuck she stopped. 'Look here,' she cried, 'my photographs are all mixed up! That is really horrid. So someone has actually been in my room who had no right to come in.' K. nodded and silently cursed the clerk Kammerer, who could never control his stupid, meaningless fidgeting. 'It is curious,' said Fräulein Bürstner, 'that I should be compelled now to forbid you to do something which you ought to forbid yourself to do, that is to enter my room in my absence.' 'But I have explained

to you, Fräulein,' said K., going over to the photographs, 'that it was not I who interfered with these photographs; still, as you won't believe me, I have to confess that the Interrogation Commission brought three Bank clerks here, one of whom, and I shall have him dismissed at the first opportunity, must have meddled with your photographs.' In answer to the Fräulein's inquiring look he added: 'Yes, there was an Interrogation Commission here to-day.' 'On your account?' asked the Fräulein. 'Yes,' replied K. 'No!' cried the girl, laughing. 'Yes, it was,' said K. 'Why, do you think I must be innocent?' 'Well, innocent,' said the Fräulein, 'I don't want to commit myself, at a moment's notice, to a verdict with so many possible implications, besides, I don't really know you; all the same, it must be a serious crime that would bring an Interrogation Commission down on a man. Yet as you are still at large — at least I gather from the look of you that you haven't just escaped from prison — you couldn't really have committed a serious crime.' 'Yes,' said K., 'but the Interrogation Commission might have discovered, not that I was innocent, but that I was not so guilty as they had assumed.' 'Certainly, that is possible,' said Fräulein Bürstner, very much on the alert. 'You see,' said K., 'you haven't much experience in legal matters.' 'No, I haven't,' said Fräulein Bürstner, 'and I have often regretted it, for I would like to know everything there is to know, and law courts interest me particularly. A court of law has a curious attraction, hasn't it? But I'll soon remedy my ignorance in that respect, for next month I am joining the clerical staff of a lawyer's office.' 'That's excellent,' said K. 'Then you'll be able to help me a little with my case.' 'That may well be,' said Fräulein Bürstner; 'why not? I like to make good use of my knowledge.' 'But I

mean it seriously,' said K., 'or at least half-seriously, as you yourself mean it. The case is too trifling to need a lawyer, but I could do very well with an adviser.' 'Yes, but if I am to be an adviser I must know what it's all about,' said Fräulein Bürstner. 'That's just the snag,' said K. 'I don't know that myself.' 'Then you've simply been making fun of me,' said Fräulein Bürstner, extravagantly disappointed, 'it was surely unnecessary to choose this late hour for doing so.' And she walked away from the photographs, where they had been standing together for a long time. 'But, Fräulein,' said K., 'I'm not making fun of you. Why won't you believe me? I have already told you all I know. In fact more than I know, for it was not a real Interrogation Commission. I called it that because I didn't know what else to call it. There was no interrogation at all, I was merely arrested, but it was a Commission.' Fräulein Bürstner sat down on the sofa and laughed again. 'What was it like, then?' she asked. 'Horrible,' said K., but he was no longer thinking of what he was saying, for he was completely taken up in staring at Fräulein Bürstner, who was leaning her head on one hand — her elbow was resting on the sofa cushions — while with the other she slowly caressed her hip. 'That's too general,' she said. 'What's too general?' asked K. 'Then he came to himself and asked: 'Shall I let you see how it happened?'' He wanted to move about and yet he did not want to leave. 'I'm tired,' said Fräulein Bürstner. 'You came home so late,' said K. 'So you've gone the length of reproaching me, and I deserve it too, for I should never have let you in. And there was no need for it, either, that's evident.' 'There was a need for it. I'll make you see that in a minute,' said K. 'May I shift this night-table from beside your bed?' 'What an idea!' cried Fräulein Bürstner.

'Of course not!' 'Then I can't show you how it happened,' said K. in agitation, as if some immeasurable wrong had been inflicted upon him. 'Oh, if you need it for your performance, shift the table by all means,' said Fräulein Bürstner, and after a pause added in a smaller voice: 'I'm so tired that I'm letting you take too many liberties.' K. stationed the table in the middle of the room and sat down behind it. 'You must picture to yourself exactly where the various people are, it's very interesting. I am the Inspector, over there on the chest two warders are sitting, beside the photographs three young men are standing. At the latch of the window — just to mention it in passing — a white blouse is dangling. And now we can begin. Oh, I've forgotten about myself, the most important person; well, I'm standing here in front of the table. The Inspector is lounging at his ease with his legs crossed. His arm hanging over the back of the chair like this, an absolute boor. And now we can really begin. The Inspector shouts as if he had to waken me out of my sleep, he actually bawls; I'm afraid, if I am to make you understand, I'll have to bawl too, but it's only my name that he bawls.' Fräulein Bürstner, who was listening with amusement, put her finger to her lips to keep K. from shouting, but it was too late, K. was too absorbed in his role, he gave a long-drawn shout: 'Joseph K.,' less loud indeed than he had threatened, but with such explosive force that it hung in the air a moment before gradually spreading through the room.

Then there was a knocking at the door of the adjoining room, a loud, sharp, regular tattoo. Fräulein Bürstner turned pale but put her hand to her heart. K. was violently startled, it took him a moment or so to withdraw his thoughts from the events of the morning and the girl

before whom he was acting them. No sooner had he come to himself than he rushed over to Fräulein Bürstner and seized her hand. 'Don't be afraid,' he whispered, 'I'll put everything right. But who can it be? There's only the living-room next door, nobody sleeps there.' 'No,' Fräulein Bürstner whispered in his ear, 'since yesterday a nephew of Frau Grubach has been sleeping there, a Captain. There was no other room he could have. I forgot all about it. Why did you have to shout like that? I'm all upset.' 'There's no need for that,' said K., and as she sank back on the cushions he kissed her on the brow. 'Away with you, away with you,' she said, hastily sitting up again, 'do go away, do go now, what are you thinking about, he's listening at the door, he hears everything. How you torment me!' 'I won't go,' said K., 'until you are a little calmer. Come to the far corner of the room, he can't hear us there.' She let herself be led there. 'You forget,' he said, 'that though this may mean unpleasantness for you, it is not at all dangerous. You know how Frau Grubach, who has the decisive voice in this matter, particularly as the Captain is her nephew, you know how she almost venerates me and absolutely believes everything I say. She is also dependent on me, I may say, for she has borrowed a fair sum of money from me. I shall confirm any explanation of our being together here that you like to invent, if it is in the least plausible, and I pledge myself to make Frau Grubach not only publicly accept it but also really and honestly believe it. You needn't consider me at all. If you want to have it announced that I assaulted you, then Frau Grubach will be informed accordingly and she will believe it without losing her confidence in me, she's so devoted to me.' Fräulein Bürstner, silent and somewhat limp, stared at

the floor. 'Why shouldn't Frau Grubach believe that I assaulted you?' K. added. He was gazing at her hair, evenly parted, looped low, firmly restrained reddish hair. He expected her to look up at him, but she said without changing her posture: 'Forgive me, I was terrified at the sudden knocking rather than at any consequence of the Captain's being there. It was so still after you shouted and then there came these knocks, that was why I was so terrified, I was sitting quite near the door, too, the knocking seemed to be just beside me. I thank you for your offer, but I'm not going to accept it. I can bear the responsibility for anything that happens in my room, no matter who questions it. I'm surprised you don't see the insult to me that is implied in your suggestion, over and above your good intentions, of course, which I do appreciate. But now go, leave me to myself, I need more than ever to be left in peace. The few minutes you begged for have stretched to half an hour and more.' K. clasped her hand and then her wrist. 'But you aren't angry with me?' he asked. She shook his hand off and answered: 'No, no, I'm never angry with anybody.' He felt for her wrist again, she let him take it this time and so led him to the door. He was firmly resolved to leave. But at the door he stopped as if he had not expected to find a door there; Fräulein Bürstner seized this moment to free herself, open the door, and slip into the entrance hall, where she whispered: 'Now, please do come! Look' — she pointed to the Captain's door, underneath which showed a strip of light — 'he has turned on his light and is amusing himself at our expense.' 'I'm just coming,' K. said, rushed out, seized her, and kissed her first on the lips, then all over the face, like some thirsty animal lapping greedily at a spring of long-sought fresh water. Finally he kissed her

on the neck, right on the throat, and kept his lips there for a long time. A slight noise from the Captain's room made him look up, 'I'm going now,' he said; he wanted to call Fräulein Bürstner by her first name, but he did not know what it was. She nodded wearily, resigned her hand for him to kiss, half turning away as if she were unaware of what she did, and went into her room with down-bent head. Shortly afterwards K. was in his bed. He fell asleep almost at once, but before doing so he thought for a little about his behaviour, he was pleased with it, yet surprised that he was not still more pleased; he was seriously concerned for Fräulein Bürstner because of the Captain.

First Interrogation

K. was informed by telephone that next Sunday a short inquiry into his case would take place. His attention was drawn to the fact that these inquiries would now follow each other regularly, perhaps not every week, but at more frequent intervals as time went on. It was in the general interest, on the one hand, that the case should be quickly concluded, but on the other hand the interrogations must be thorough in every respect, although, because of the strain involved, they must never last too long. For this reason the expedient of these rapidly succeeding but short interrogations had been chosen. Sunday had been selected as the day of inquiry so that K. might not be disturbed in his professional work. It was assumed that he would agree to this arrangement, but if he preferred some other day they would meet his wishes to the best of their ability. For instance, it would be possible to hold the inquiries during the night, although then K. would probably not be fresh enough. At any rate they would expect him on Sunday, if K. had no objection. It was, of course, understood that he must appear without fail, he did not need to be reminded of that. He was given the number of the house where he had to go, it was a house in an outlying suburban street where he had never been before.

On receiving this message K. replaced the receiver without answering; his mind was made up to keep the appointment on Sunday, it was absolutely essential, the case was getting under way and he must fight it; this first