

# Franz Kafka's The Palace

Shad Gregory

## 1

When K. arrived, it was late in the night,  
The village was covered under deep snow,  
And the castle hill was nowhere in sight.  
Fog and darkness enveloped him and though  
The sky's faintest glow of light could not show  
The outline of the great Palace, K. stood  
On the wooden bridge, the darkness below,  
The seeming emptiness was understood  
To offer our hero the start of something good.

## 2

And then, a decisive intake of air,  
K. descended to the village below  
Hoping to find lodgings anywhere there.  
In the inn, peasants still stirred to and fro  
In spite of the hour. There were no rooms, though  
The Innkeeper offered a sack of straw,  
And K.'s weariness had brought him so low  
That he eagerly accepted as fair  
The innkeeper's offer to sleep on the floor there.

## 3

But soon then K. was roused from his slumber  
By a young man with a thespian's face.  
The peasants were still there too in number  
And many had turned from their beer in case  
An entertaining spectacle took place.  
The young man was dressed in fancy city  
Clothes; his eyes were narrowed; it seemed the case  
The young man was the son of a pretty  
Big deal, and he was not trying to be witty!

4

A big deal indeed, the son of the Palace  
Steward stood over K., his eyebrows strong,  
Ready to torment with polite malice  
Our poor K. over his excursion along  
The village's outskirts lurking among  
The shadows and darkness of the late hour.  
You have entered the village was his song,  
And the right to stay in any bower  
Or hut, resided only in Count Westwest's power.

5

Half sitting up and straightening his hair  
K. nonchalantly glanced up at the crowd;  
The innkeeper, the peasants in their chairs,  
The young man asking if K. should be allow'd,  
All waiting there for K. to speak out loud  
His intentions on such a snowy night.  
"Where am I?" K. asked as if he were proud  
of his ignorance, "I'm lost in the night."  
He cried, "Palace you say? But there was not one in sight."

6

The young man was astonished by K.'s act,  
"Why indeed, the Palace of Count Westwest!"  
"And you need the Count's permission, in fact,  
For a weary traveller to simply rest  
Overnight?" asked K. upon being press'd  
By the expecting crowd. Was it a dream  
That gave to him the notion that a guest  
Could be so cruelly turned out? It did seem  
To beggar belief. Such cruelty K. could not gleam.

7

"You must have permission!" was the reply.  
And with that, the dramatic young man turn'd  
To his audience, and said with a sigh,  
"Or maybe it's not required to have earn'd  
The Count's blessings!" And now having so learn'd  
The conditions of discretely dwelling  
overnight, grasping that which so concern'd  
the crowd, K. yawned, and perhaps overselling  
his nonchalance, announced his plans without yelling.

8

"Now, if it is permission that I need,"  
Said K. "Then it is permission I seek."  
And as if he were about to proceed,  
Cast off his blanket with nary a peek  
At the shocked crowd, barely able to speak.  
"Permission from whom?" sputtered the young man,  
"At this midnight hour?" he said with a shriek.  
"It isn't possible?" and K. began  
To yawn and stretch. "See, I like to sleep when I can!"

9

The young man was beside himself with rage,  
"Why you're not but a low-down dirty bum!"  
With a passion found only on the stage.  
"The count demands respect! Not some sass from  
A common tramp who's lower than pond scum!  
You must depart the count's territory  
At once!" At this, K. was able to drum  
Up the peace of a saint in God's glory,  
"Enough!" he said, and K. then began his story.

10

Does K. feel despair? Does he cry in the night?  
Is he so fixated on his mission  
That he no longer dreads the morning light?  
Why has he come here without permission?  
Travelled so far on this expedition  
Without a companion to help him through  
The snow and darkness with precision.  
Where is his family? Are they so few  
That K. was attracted to the castle in view?

11

"I've had enough of your nonsense." said K,  
"The Innkeeper and these good gentlemen  
Are my witnesses should I need to sway  
A jury of my peers. I take it then  
You would like to know why I am here in  
Your village. I am the land surveyor  
Sent for by the Count. Now there, you see when  
I saw the snow, layer upon layer,  
I sat out on the trek after a hopeful prayer."

**12**

"But, unfortunately, I lost my way  
More than a few times and arrived so late  
That I knew it was too late in the day  
To report to the Castle in my state.  
This is why I chose to accept my fate  
And make do with camping out on the floor  
Here in the corner as much as I hate  
To give up the comforts of a locked door  
And a sweet bed, I knew my sleep would not be poor."

**13**

"Tommorrow my assistants will arrive  
Via carriage with the equipment in tow.  
Now that's all that I'm willing to contrive  
As far as an explanation will go.  
Now goodnight fellas and, please, go pound snow!"  
K. turned to the stove and pulled his blanket tight.  
The Inn's mob retreated after K.'s show,  
Confused by this information's new light,  
They conversed in hushed tones while keeping K. in sight.

**14**

"Surveyor?" the word was tossed back and forth,  
And then a silence fell over the mob.  
The young man, eager to show off his worth,  
And now determined to finish the job,  
Whispered in a tone so as not to rob  
K. of his sleep but loud enough to hear  
"I'll call the Castle, ask about this slob,  
And check his story." he said with a sneer.  
He headed to the phone and brought it close to his ear.

**15**

"Good Goddamn!" thought K. to himself, "This place  
Is decked out to the nines! They have a phone?"  
Said telephone was crowded in a space  
Directly above K.'s head. In his own  
Weariness, among them all, he was alone  
In overlooking the infernal thing.  
Now K.'s restful sleep was sure to be blown  
By the eager fellow's attempt to ring  
The Palace. And now poor K. had to hear him sing.

16

Then the question was, would K. allow it?  
He decided to allow it, but now  
It was the case he could find no merit  
In feigning sleep, he flipped o'er with a scow  
And waited for the young man to find how  
To inquire without disrupting K.'s sleep.  
Across the way the dim light did allow  
K. to see the *bauren* together deep  
In discussion and tightly piled in a heap.

17

K.'s arrival was no trivial news.  
Surveyors don't pop up every day!  
Every landlord had something to lose  
If the Count changed the lines any old way.  
The kitchen door was opened all the way,  
And it's frame filled by the landlady's form.  
The host, eager to report on the fray,  
Tiptoed in her direction to inform  
The mighty Landlady of the incoming storm.

18

The telephone conversation began.  
The Palace Governor was sound asleep,  
But one of his lackeys was the night man,  
A certain Herr Fritz, who was known to keep  
Some abysmally late hours sometimes deep  
Into the night, was awake. The young man,  
Going by Schwarzer, proceeded to leap  
Into how he had found K., worn and wan,  
Sleeping on a dirty straw sack, so he began.

19

Of course, Schwarzer was suspicious of him!  
The landlord had neglected his duty;  
And so the burden was his to, with grim  
Determination, check out K.'s beauty  
Of a tale. Awakening K.'s booty  
From a deep sleep, his interrogation  
Of the man while he endured K.s snooty  
Attitude, and threw his accusation  
At K., along with expulsion from the nation.

**20**

Schwarzer was shocked by K's ingratitude.  
Perhaps rightly so, since K. claimed to be  
A surveyor appointed to the good  
By the Count his very own self and we  
Can all assume that it's Schwarzer's duty  
To verify K.'s claim, and so for sure  
He was going to ask this Fritz to see  
Into K.'s claim, that the count did procure  
His services, and in his motives, were they pure?

**21**

And then all was quiet. The whole lot of them  
Waited with bated breath for Fritz to return  
With the Palace's answer, a precious gem  
Of information, so that they might learn  
Could they send K. flying out with a stern  
Flogging? And K.? He kept his poker face  
Firmly intact and determined to earn  
His spot with the rats in the Palace's race.  
He stayed stoic, steadfast; his mask firmly in place.

**22**

Soon the phone's bray cut through the quiet.  
It was Fritz, his report musta been brief  
For Schwarzer, as if to start a riot,  
Shouted, "I told you so!" in stark relief  
And slammed down the receiver, "A liar-in-chief!  
Nobody has heard of this surveyor!"  
K. dove under his blanket in the belief  
That Schwarzer, bauren, and everyone there  
Would pounce upon poor K. right there without a care.

**23**

He waited for the assault with unease,  
Under the blanket K. said a small prayer,  
When the phone rang again it seemed to squeeze  
the soul out of poor K. as he lay there.  
He slowly poked his head out, with great care  
And then watched Schwarzer return to the phone,  
Meekly allowing the caller to share  
A long story that led Schwarzer to groan,  
"Mistake? How can I explain this all on my own?"

**24**

"This puts me in quite a pickle, you know,  
And the office manager made the call?"  
K. listened to this telephonic show  
With great interest. Had the Palace all  
but yielded to K. without even a brawl?  
K. felt hope, saw light where there was no light  
Before. Was the Palace totally in thrall  
To its own power that it had lost sight  
Of the freedom that K. would enjoy in the fight?

**25**

But then, K. began to reflect again,  
Perhaps the keen Palace had taken stock  
Of him and, finding him wanting, had then  
Likened him to Sisyphus and his rock,  
A sad figure racing against the clock,  
Suddenly the Palace had, with a smile,  
Taken up the struggle to perhaps block  
K.; His effort to join the village while  
Enjoying a Palace job and living in style.

**26**

Someone told falsehoods about Joseph K.  
And as he lay in a peaceful slumber,  
Strange men arrested him that faithful day.  
It was not his choice to pluck a number  
From a ticket dispenser and lumber  
To the back of the line. He did not choose  
To embrace the law that would encumber  
His efforts, leading Joseph K. to lose  
His own life to two men in fading twilight hues.

**27**

But, what can be said then of our poor K.?  
He certainly chose his peculiar fate,  
Groveling for a position all day,  
Every day, no matter how small or great.  
Sleeping away by the palace's gate  
And prostrating himself before the law  
Seasons will pass and K. will track the date  
Until he is robbed of all that he saw  
And his poor body is found in the springtime's thaw.

28

Schwarzer approached K. bowing and scraping,  
But K. only shooed him off on his way.  
K. was offered a chance of escaping  
The pub for the innkeeper's room til day,  
But K. shook his head and would only say  
To bring a washbasin with soap and towel  
Items the landlady brought right away.  
The lamp was darkened, with a nary a growl  
From the *bauren* as they left K. with the night owl.