

LBRIS

We know
books

*The Metamorphosis
and Other Stories*

Franz Kafka

Translated by Christopher Moncrieff



ALMA CLASSICS

ALMA CLASSICS
an imprint of

ALMA BOOKS LTD
Thornton House
Thornton Road
Wimbledon Village
London SW19 4NG
United Kingdom
www.almaclassics.com

This translation first published by Alma Classics in 2014
Reprinted 2015, 2017, 2018
This new edition first published in 2020
Reprinted 2022, 2023
Translation © Christopher Moncrieff, 2014

Cover design: nathanburtondesign.com

Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY



ISBN: 978-1-84749-352-1

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise), without the prior written permission of the publisher. This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not be resold, lent, hired out or otherwise circulated without the express prior consent of the publisher.

Contents

The Metamorphosis and Other Stories	1
<i>Children on a Country Road</i>	3
<i>Exposing a Confidence Trickster</i>	7
<i>An Impromptu Walk</i>	9
<i>Resolutions</i>	10
<i>A Trip to the Mountains</i>	11
<i>The Plight of a Bachelor</i>	12
<i>The Shopkeeper</i>	13
<i>Gazing Distractedly out of the Window</i>	15
<i>Walking Home</i>	16
<i>Men Running Past</i>	17
<i>The Passenger</i>	18
<i>Dresses</i>	19
<i>Mutual Rejection</i>	20
<i>For the Consideration of Gentleman Jockeys</i>	21
<i>A Window onto the Street</i>	22
<i>Oh, to Be a Red Indian</i>	23
<i>Trees</i>	24
<i>An Unhappy Being</i>	25
<i>The Sentence</i>	29
<i>The Metamorphosis</i>	40
<i>The Penal Colony</i>	88
<i>The New Barrister</i>	115
<i>A Country Doctor</i>	116
<i>Up in the Gods</i>	122
<i>An Old Manuscript</i>	123

<i>The Door of Justice</i>	125
<i>Jackals and Arabs</i>	127
<i>A Visit to the Mine</i>	131
<i>The Next Village</i>	134
<i>A Message from the Emperor</i>	135
<i>The Concerns of a Father</i>	136
<i>Eleven Sons</i>	138
<i>Fratricide</i>	143
<i>A Dream</i>	146
<i>A Report for an Academy</i>	148
<i>First Sorrow</i>	157
<i>The Little Woman</i>	160
<i>The Hunger Artist</i>	167
<i>Josefine the Singer, or the Mousefolk</i>	177
<i>The Great Wall of China</i>	193
<i>The Bridge</i>	206
<i>The Truth about Sancho Panza</i>	207
<i>The City Coat of Arms</i>	208
<i>Poseidon</i>	210
<i>The Silence of the Sirens</i>	212
Note on the Text	214

*The Metamorphosis
and Other Stories*

Children on a Country Road

I HEARD WAGONS DRIVING PAST outside the railings of the garden fence, caught the occasional glimpse of them through the barely stirring leaves. How the spokes and shafts of the wooden wheels cracked in the summer heat! Farm labourers making their way home from the fields laughed as if it were something to be ashamed of.

I was sitting quietly on the little swing under the trees in my parents' garden.

On the other side of the fence, the activity was never-ending. Children went running by, there one moment, gone the next; carts of grain drove past with men and women sitting on sheaves of corn, casting dark shadows over the flower beds; as evening drew in I saw a man with a walking stick out for a stroll, while two young women strolling arm in arm in the other direction stepped onto the grass verge and greeted him.

Then some birds rose into the air with a great flurry, and I watched them go, saw how they vanished in an instant, moving so fast that it was as if it were me who was falling, not them who were rising, and suddenly I felt faint and held on tightly to the ropes, then began to swing gently back and forth. Soon I was swinging faster, a cool breeze got up and in place of the birds there appeared trembling, twinkling stars.

I had supper by candlelight. I was quite tired, and more than once I leant my elbows on the little wooden table as I chewed my bread and butter. The heavy openwork curtains billowed in the warm wind; every now and then a child would grab at them as they walked past, as if they wanted to get a better look at me or say something. The candle soon blew out as usual, but the swarm of flies went on hovering for a while in the dark smoke that it left behind. If one of the children asked me something through the open window I looked at them as if I were gazing up at the mountains or a clear blue sky, although it didn't seem to matter much to them whether I replied or not.

But when one of them climbed in over the window sill and told me that the others were waiting at the front door, I got up with a sigh.

"Oh no, why did you sigh like that? What's happened? Is it some great, irreparable disaster? Won't we ever get over it? Is everything really lost?"

No, all was not lost. We ran out of the house. "Thank God for that, we thought you'd never come!"

"You're always late!"

"What do you mean?"

"Well you are."

"Why don't you stay at home if you don't want to come with us?"

"You're a heartless lot!"

"Us, heartless! What on earth are you talking about?"

We dived head first into the evening. It wasn't really day or night. The buttons on our jackets were soon clacking together like teeth; we were running side by side in two columns, Indian file, breathing fire like wild animals in the tropics. Like cuirassiers in a war long ago, knees up high and stamping our feet, we drove each other on down the little alleyway, our legs building up enough speed to carry us up to the main road. Some of the others jumped into the ditch, but no sooner had they vanished into the dark of the embankment than they reappeared on the track that ran across the fields and stood there like strangers, staring down at us.

"Come down!"

"No, you come up!"

"Just so you can push us down again? Not likely – we're not that stupid!"

"You're afraid, that's what you mean! Come on, come up here!"

"Oh yes? That's just what you say. You'll push us down again! What do you take us for?"

We launched an attack, were punched in the chest and let ourselves roll back down into the ditch, where we lay in the grass. Everything was warm; we didn't feel hot or cold, just tired.

If you turned on your right side and put your hand under your ear, you immediately felt like going to sleep. However hard you tried to stay awake, to keep your chin up, you just slumped back into a deeper ditch. Once there, with one arm stretched out obliquely in front of you, legs splayed out at an odd angle, you tried to throw

yourself forward, only to fall into an even deeper ditch. And no one wanted to know anything about that.

How you managed to get to sleep in the very last ditch, stretching your whole body – especially your knees – right out, was something that no one thought much about, and you just lay on your back as if you were ill and felt like crying. If one of the other boys jumped over you on his way from the embankment to the road, his elbows held in tightly to his sides and the soles of his shoes pitch black, you blinked.

The moon was already quite high in the sky; by its light you saw a post coach driving past. A breeze had got up; it could even be felt down in the ditch, while in the nearby woods the leaves began rustling. No one was keen to stay there on their own for much longer.

"Where is everyone?"

"Come here!"

"Keep together all of you!"

"Why are you hiding? Stop messing about!"

"Don't you know that the post coach has gone by?"

"No, I didn't. Has it really?"

"Course it has, it went by while you were asleep!"

"Me, asleep? No I wasn't!"

"Do shut up, anyone could see you were."

"Oh, leave off, will you."

"Come on then!"

We ran off, huddled in a group, holding each other by the hand; you couldn't really lift your head high enough because we were going downhill. Someone let out an Indian war cry, our legs began to gallop like never before, with every stride the wind seemed to lift us up by the waist and bear us along. We were unstoppable, so intent on our headlong course that even when we overtook one another we were able to fold our arms and gaze around us quite calmly.

When we got to the bridge over the mountain stream we stopped; those who had gone on ahead came back and joined us. The water pounded against the rocks and tree stumps below as if it weren't getting late. There was no reason why one of us shouldn't jump off the parapet of the bridge.

Then, all of a sudden, from behind some bushes in the distance a train appeared, its compartments lit up and the windows apparently wide open. Someone began to sing a popular ballad, but we

all wanted to join in. So we sang, we sang faster than the train itself, we swayed our arms to and fro because our voices weren't enough – what a happy hullabaloo we made. When you sing along with other people it's as if you're hooked.

We sang with the woods behind us, with the sound of those distant travellers in our ears. In the village the grown-ups would still be awake; all the mothers would be turning back the bedcovers, getting ready for the night.

Then it was time. I kissed the boy next to me, just shook the hands of the other three, then set off down the road at a run; no one called out after me. When I got to the first crossroads, where they couldn't see me any more, I turned off and ran back along the path across the field until I got to the woods. What I longed for was to go to the city in the south, the one that people in the village always talked about:

"Just think, there are people there who never sleep!"

"Why not?"

"Because they're never tired."

"Why not?"

"Because they're fools."

"Don't fools ever get tired?"

"How can fools get tired?"

Exposing a Confidence Trickster

AT ABOUT TEN O'CLOCK AT NIGHT, accompanied by an individual whom I had met before and barely knew, but who had suddenly started following me everywhere, sending me on a two-hour round tour of the streets and alleyways, I finally arrived at the grand townhouse where I had been invited to a party.

"Well then!" I said, clapping my hands to show that it was time for us finally to part company. I had already made several less decisive attempts and was feeling rather weary.

"Are you going in straight away?" he asked. From his mouth came a sound rather like teeth clattering together.

"Yes."

And I was, because I'd been invited, and had already told him as much. But I'd been invited to this house, a house that I would have very much liked to have been asked to before, not just to stand outside in the street, staring at the front door over the ears of the person in front of me – and certainly not to wait in mute silence with him as if we had arranged to stand here together for a while. The nearby houses seemed to join in with the silence, as well as with the darkness that rose all the way to the stars above. And then there were the footsteps of unseen people out for a walk whose destination one felt no desire to know, the wind which kept blowing on the other side of the street, a gramophone that was playing behind the closed windows of a room somewhere – they could all be heard coming from the silence as if it belonged to them personally and always would.

Then, in his own name and – after giving an acquiescing little smile – in mine as well, my companion leant forward, stretched out his right arm along the wall, leant his face against it and closed his eyes.

I didn't witness this smile to the very end because I turned away in shame. For it was only when I saw his smile that I realized he was nothing but a confidence trickster. I'd lived in the town for months and thought I knew these swindlers inside out: the way they would appear out of a side street at night and walk towards

you holding out their hand like the landlady of an inn, how they hovered round the advertising pillar where you were standing as if playing hide-and-seek, spied on you from behind it, or at least with one eye, how they suddenly bore down on you at a cross-roads when you were about to step off the kerb and were feeling nervous! Yes, I understood them all too well; they were the first people I got to know in the little taverns here in the town; it was thanks to them that I got my first glimpse of the intransigence that I now find it impossible to imagine not being part and parcel of the world, and whose presence I can already sense within me. How they keep standing there in front of you even when you've escaped from them a long time ago and there is nothing more that they can wheedle out of you! How they never sit down, never fall over, quite the opposite: they keep on giving you those same persuasive looks, if only from a distance! Their methods are always the same: they plant themselves right in front of you, try to stop you from getting to where you are going; in exchange they offer you lodgings in their arms, and if the resentment that has been building up in you finally breaks loose they see it as an embrace into which they launch themselves head first.

Yet tonight it was only after being with him for a long time that I recognized these same old tricks. I ground the tips of my fingers together as if to make the shame go away.

But the fellow kept on leaning against the wall, kept on playing the part of a confidence trickster, so pleased with himself that his visible cheek blushed quite pink.

"You've been rumbled!" I said, tapping him on the shoulder. And then I hurried up the steps, where I was pleasantly surprised by the devoted expressions on the faces of the servants in the entrance hall. I looked at each of them in turn, standing in line in front of me, as they took my coat and brushed the dust off my boots. Then, with a sigh of relief and straightening myself up, I walked into the drawing room.

An Impromptu Walk

WHEN YOU SEEM TO HAVE DECIDED to stay at home for the evening and have put on your dressing gown, and after supper you sit at the table in the lamplight and get on with some work or have a game of cards, after which you will go to bed as usual, when it is raining cats and dogs so it stands to reason that you will stay in, when you have been sitting quietly at the table for so long that people would be astonished to see you get up and go out, when the staircase is plunged in darkness and the front door locked and bolted, when despite all this you suddenly feel unsettled and get up, take off your dressing gown and promptly reappear dressed to go out, explaining that you simply have to go out, something that you have actually already announced by the act of taking your leave so abruptly, depending on how quickly you close the front door after you, you will think that you have left all or some of your troubles behind you, when you find yourself out in the street with limbs that respond with particular agility to the unexpected freedom that you have provided for them, when by the mere fact of taking this one decision you suddenly feel capable of taking all the others that you bear within you, when you realize with unusual clarity that you have more than enough energy to bring about and tolerate this sudden change of course, when you go hurrying through the streets – then this is an evening when you have withdrawn from the bosom of your family, who are plunged into non-being while you, standing tall and steadfast, a clearly defined figure, spurring yourself on, draw yourself up to your full height.

These feelings will be all the more intense if at this late hour you call on a friend and ask how he is.

Resolutions

IT OUGHT TO BE EASY to drag oneself from the slough of despair by making a simple effort of will. I prise myself out of the armchair, inject movement into my head and neck, set my eyes flashing and flex the muscles around them. I try to anticipate and head off every possible feeling and emotion, greet A enthusiastically as soon as he arrives, gladly tolerate B's presence in my room, and when I am at C's house absorb everything that is said, however difficult and painful it might be.

Yet even if I put this plan into action, every mistake – and these are inevitable – brings the whole performance to a grinding halt, both the easy and the less easy things, and I have to go back to the beginning.

So the best thing is to take everything on board, to behave like a lump of lard, and even if you sense that you are getting carried away, not to allow yourself to be forced into taking any unnecessary steps, to keep a watchful eye on other people, not to feel remorse, in short, to make it your business to stifle whichever of life's ghosts still remain, that is, leave room for that ultimate peace, the silence of the tomb, and don't let anything take its place.

A characteristic sign that someone is in such a state of mind is if they keep running their little finger over their eyebrows.

A Trip to the Mountains

"I DON'T KNOW," I said in a lifeless voice, "I really don't know. If nobody comes then nobody comes. I haven't done anyone any harm, nobody has done me any harm, yet nobody wants to help me. Simply nobody. It shouldn't be like that. If nobody will help me, it's because nobody is kind. I'd really like – and why not? – to go on a trip with no one except Nobody. A trip to the mountains of course, where else? Oh, how Nobody huddles against all the others, their arms all linked together, their feet all taking tiny little steps! You obviously realize that they are all wearing tailcoats. We make our way so-so, the wind blows through the holes that we and our limbs make. The mountain air sets people's voices free! It's amazing that we don't burst into song."