

Franz Kafka

Diary

1911-1922

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THE DIARIES OF  
FRANZ KAFKA

1910-1913

EDITED BY Max Brod

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\* Only longer compositions, or those of a finished nature, are listed here.



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November 14. Tuesday. Yesterday at Max's who returned from his Brünn lecture.

In the afternoon while falling asleep. As though the solid skullcap encircling the insensitive cranium had moved more deeply inward and left a part of the brain exposed to the free play of light and muscles.

To awaken on a cold autumn morning full of yellowish light. To force your way through the half-shut window and while still in front of the panes, before you fall, to hover, arms extended, belly arched, legs curved backward, like the figures on the bows of ships in old times.

Before falling asleep.

It seems so dreadful to be a bachelor, to become an old man struggling to keep one's dignity while begging for an invitation whenever one wants to spend an evening in company, having to carry one's meal home in one's hand, unable to expect anyone with a lazy sense of calm confidence, able only with difficulty and vexation to give a gift to someone, having to say good night at the front door, never being able to run up a stairway beside one's wife, to lie ill and have only the solace of the view from one's window when one can sit up, to have only side doors in one's room leading into other people's living rooms, to feel estranged from one's family, with whom one can keep on close terms only by marriage, first by the marriage of one's parents, then, when the effect of that has worn off, by one's own, having to admire other people's children and not even being allowed to go on saying: "I have none myself," never to feel oneself grow older since there is no family growing up around one, modeling oneself in appearance

and behavior on one or two bachelors remembered from our youth.

This is all true, but it is easy to make the error of unfolding future sufferings so far in front of one that one's eye must pass beyond them and never again return, while in reality, both today and later, one will stand with a palpable body and a real head, a real forehead that is, for smiting on with one's hand.<sup>81</sup>

Now I'll try a sketch for the introduction to "Richard and Samuel."

November 15. Yesterday evening, already with a sense of foreboding, pulled the cover off the bed, lay down and again became aware of all my abilities as though I were holding them in my hand; they tightened my chest, they set my head on fire, for a short while, to console myself for not getting up to work, I repeated: "That's not healthy, that's not healthy," and with almost visible purpose tried to draw sleep over my head. I kept thinking of a cap with a visor which, to protect myself, I pulled down hard over my forehead. How much did I lose yesterday, how the blood pounded in my tight head, capable of anything and restrained only by powers which are indispensable for my very life and are here being wasted.

It is certain that everything I have conceived in advance, even when I was in a good mood, whether word for word or just casually, but in specific words, appears dry, wrong, inflexible, embarrassing to everybody around me, timid, but above all incomplete when I try to write it down at my desk, although I have forgotten nothing of the original conception. This is naturally related in large part to the fact



When it looks as if you had made up your mind finally to stay at home for the evening, when you have put on your house jacket and sat down after supper with a light on the table to the piece of work or the game that usually precedes your going to bed, when the weather outside is unpleasant so that staying indoors seems natural, and when you have already been sitting quietly at the table for so long that your departure must occasion [not only paternal anger but] surprise to everyone, when besides, the stairs are in darkness and the front door locked and in spite of all that you have started up in a sudden fit of restlessness, changed your jacket, abruptly dressed yourself for the street, explained that you must go out and with a few curt words of leave-taking actually gone out, banging the flat door more or less hastily according to the degree of displeasure you think you have left behind you [and so cut off the general discussion of your departure, and] when you find yourself once more in the street with limbs swinging extra freely in answer to the unexpected liberty you have procured for them, when as a result of this decisive action you feel aroused within yourself all the potentialities of decisive action, when you recognize with more than usual significance that your strength is greater than your need to accomplish effortlessly the swiftest of changes, [that left alone you grow in understanding and calm, and in the enjoyment of them] then for that evening you have so completely got away from your family [that the most distant journey could not take you farther and you have lived through what is for Europe so extreme an experience of solitude that one can only call it Russian.] All this is still heightened if at such a late hour in the evening you look up a friend to see how he is getting on.<sup>40</sup>

do it by strength of will, should be easy. I force myself out of my chair, circle the table in long strides, exercise my head and neck, make my eyes sparkle, tighten the muscles around them. Defy my own feelings, welcome Löwy enthusiastically supposing he comes to see me, amiably tolerate my sister in the room while I write, swallow all that is said at Max's, whatever pain and trouble it may cost me, in long draughts. Yet even if I manage fairly well in some of this, one obvious slip, and slips cannot be avoided, will stop the whole process, the easy and the difficult alike, and I will have to turn backward in the circle. So the best resource is to meet everything as calmly as possible, to make yourself an inert mass, and, if you feel that you are carried away, not to let yourself be lured into taking a single unnecessary step, to stare at others with the eyes of an animal, to feel no compunction, to yield to the non-conscious that you believe far away while it is precisely what is burning you, with your own hand to throttle down whatever ghostly life remains in you, that is, to enlarge the final peace of the graveyard and let nothing survive save that. A characteristic movement in such a condition is to run your little finger along your eyebrows.<sup>42</sup>

Short spell of faintness yesterday in the Café City with Löwy. How I bent down over a newspaper to hide it.

Goethe's beautiful silhouette. Simultaneous impression of repugnance when looking at this perfect human body, since to surpass this degree of perfection is unimaginable and yet it looks only as though it had been put together by accident. The erect posture, the dangling arms, the slender throat, the bend in the knees.

story, a glance at the first few lines is enough to show one immediately that this is an unashamed imitation of Lagerlöf. The whole story makes it even clearer. What does this mean? This means that this Feldstein, or whatever her name is, is the Durège woman's tool, that she read the *Gutsgeschichte*, brought by him to the Durège woman, at her house, that in writing this story, she made use of what she had read and that therefore both women are exploiting him, one on the first page of the magazine section, the other on the third page. Naturally anyone can read and imitate Lagerlöf on his own initiative but in this case, after all, his influence is too apparent. (He keeps waving the page back and forth.)

Monday noon, right after the bank closed, he naturally went to see Mrs. Durège. She opens her door only a crack, she is very nervous: "But, Mr. Reichmann, why have you come at noon? My husband is asleep. I can't let you in now."—"Mrs. Durège, you must let me in by all means. It's about an important matter." She sees I am in earnest and lets me come in. Her husband, of course, was definitely not at home. In the next room I see my manuscript on the table and this immediately starts me thinking. "Mrs. Durège, what have you done with my manuscript. Without my consent you gave it to the *Tagblatt*. How much did they pay you?" She trembles, she knows nothing, has no idea how it could have gotten into the paper. "*J'accuse*, Mrs. Durège," I said, half jokingly, but still in such a way that she sees what I really mean, and I keep repeating this "*J'accuse*, Mrs. Durège" all the time I am there so that she can take note of it, and when I go I even say it several times at the door. Indeed, I understand her nervousness well. If I make it public or sue her, her position would really be impossible, she would have to leave the Women's Progress, etc.



- 26 A novel by Wilhelm Schäfer. Kafka had a great deal of respect for this writer. He later went over to the Nazis.
- 27 One of Kafka's sisters.
- 28 A rough translation of the Yiddish would be: "crazy hot-head."
- 29 "Enough for *parnusse*," enough to live on.
- 30 "The Aeroplanes at Brescia." See Max Brod, *Franz Kafka, a Biography*, Appendix II.
- 31 This entry appeared later, with a few changes and omissions, in *Meditation*, under the title, "Bachelor's Ill Luck." The version Kafka published has been translated by Willa and Edwin Muir and will appear in a forthcoming volume of Kafka's early sketches and stories. The translation appearing here is by the Muirs, except in those places where the German text of the published version and the version in the *Diaries* differ.
- 32 Written at the time Kafka was studying for his bar examination.
- 33 Emil Utitz, later a professor of philosophy, a fellow student of Kafka's at the Gymnasium.
- 34 The family of Egon Erwin Kisch, author of *Der rasende Reporter*. His brother, Paul Kisch, studied Germanics.
- 35 A toy through the aperture of which one perceived the successive positions of a figure affixed to a revolving wheel. It thus created the illusion of motion.
- 36 An uneducated person. Kafka acquired this and similar expressions from his conversations with the actor Löwy.
- 37 Felix Weltsch, the philosopher and author of *Gnade und Freiheit*.
- 38 Properly, *mohel*—"circumciser."
- 39 A novel by Emil Strauss, whom Kafka estimated highly.
- 40 This entry, slightly changed, appeared under the title of "The Sudden Walk," in *Meditation*. The translation is based on one made by the Muirs (see n 31 above).
- 41 Christian von Ehrenfels, the philosopher and originator of the *Gestalt* theory in psychology.
- 42 Cf. this entry with "Resolutions," in *Meditation*. The translation is based on one made by the Muirs (see n 31 above).

- philosopher from Prague: 153, 271, *n* 33
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