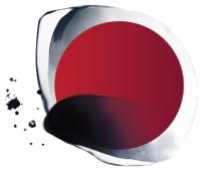




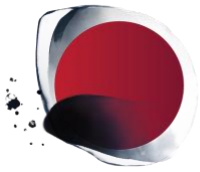
Before the Law



“Before the law stands a gate keeper. To this gate keeper there comes a man from the country who asks for admittance to the Law. But the gate keeper says that he cannot grant admittance at the moment. The man thinks it over and asks if he will be allowed in later. "It is possible," says the gate keeper, "but not at the moment." Since the gate stands open as



usual, and the gate keeper steps to one side, the man can stoop to peer through the gateway into the interior. Seeing this, the gate keeper laughs and says: "If you like, just try to go in despite my veto. But be warned: I am powerful. And I am the meekest of the gate keepers. From hall to hall there is one gate keeper after another, each more powerful than the last. The third gate keeper is already so terrible that even I cannot bear to look at him." These are difficulties the man from the country has not expected; the Law, he thinks, should surely be accessible at all times and to everyone, but as he now takes a closer look at the gate keeper in his fur coat, with his big sharp nose and long thin, black Tartar beard, he decides that it is better to wait until he gets permission to enter. The gate keeper gives him a stool and lets him sit down at one side of the door. There he sits for days and even years. He makes many attempts to be admitted, and wearies the gate keeper by his importunity. The gate keeper frequently has little interviews with him, asking him questions about his home and many other things, but the questions are put indifferently, patronizingly, and always finish with the statement that he cannot be let in yet. The man, who has furnished himself with many things for his journey, sacrifices all he has, however valuable, to the gate keeper. The gate keeper accepts everything, but always with the remark: "I am only taking it to keep you from thinking you have omitted anything." During these many years the man fixes his attention almost continuously on the gate keeper. He forgets the other gate keepers, and this first one seems to him the sole obstacle preventing access to the Law. He curses his bad luck, in his early years boldly and loudly; later, as he grows old, he only grumbles to himself. He becomes childish, and since in his year long contemplation of the gate keeper he has come to know even the fleas in his fur collar, he begs the fleas to help him and to change the gate keeper's mind. At length his eyesight begins to fail, and he does not know whether the world is darker or whether his eyes are only deceiving him. Yet in his darkness he is now aware of a radiance that streams inextinguishable from the gateway of the Law. Now he nears the end of his life. Before he dies, all his experiences in these long years gather themselves in his head to a point, a question he has not yet asked the gate keeper. He waves him nearer since he can no longer raise his stiffening body. The gate keeper has to bend low toward him, for the difference in height between them has altered much to the man's disadvantage. "What do you want to know now?" asks the gate keeper; "you are insatiable." "Everyone strives to reach the Law," says the man, "so how does it happen that for all these many years no one but myself has ever begged for admittance?" The gate keeper recognizes the man has reached his end, and, to let his



failing senses catch the words, roars in his ear: "No one else could ever be admitted here, since this gate was made only for you. And now, I am going to shut it." — Franz Kafka

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