The Castle Study Guide

The Castle by Franz Kafka

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

K., a land surveyor, arrives late at night in an anonymous town which sits at the foot of a large castle. After some confusion about his identity and whether he has permission to be there, K. is able to get some sleep. K. tries to go up to the Castle himself but finds the thick snow too tiring. He stops for awhile in the house of a master tanner named Lasseman, but the inhabitants are only too eager to get rid of him. He returns to his inn and meets his two, identical assistants, Artur and Jeremias, whom he decides to refer to simply as "Artur". A young boy named Barnabas comes to the Inn with message for K. It is a letter from Klamm, a Castle official and K.'s director, which tells him to report to the village chairman. Thinking that Barnabas is returning to the Castle, K. travels with him but finds himself instead at Barnabas' house, where he meets Barnabas' sisters, Olga and Amalia. He goes with Olga to the Gentlemen's Inn where he meets Frieda, Klamm's mistress. The two hit it off very quickly and make love on the floor of the bar. She decides to leave the Inn and go with him. They return to K.'s Inn where he is berated by the landlady, who, it turns out, is Frieda's mother. She does not like K. and discourages him from attempting to meet Klamm. K. is not discouraged however, but leaves first to talk to the village chairman. The chairman informs him that, unfortunately, there has been a mistake; the town has no need for a land surveyor. K. returns to the inn and, before long, is offered a post as school janitor by the chairman. It is not much, but Frieda urges him to accept it since they do not have much else going for them right now.

They move into the school's gymnasium and K. finds himself increasingly irritated by his assistants. They were once just constantly underfoot, but now they seem to be actively wanting to get him in trouble. He sends them away and locks the door. Anxious to hear from Klamm—whom he still is trying to meet—K. goes back to Barnabas' house to see if there is any news. Barnabas is not there but he is pulled into a long conversation with his sister, Olga. Olga explains how their family came to have such a bad reputation. It all started when Amalia rejected the invitation to come to the room of one of the Castle officials. The situation might only have been temporary, but the family did nothing to combat it and are now cursed for the rest of their lives. Their only ray of hope in the whole situation is Barnabas' connection with the Castle as messenger and, she explains, that it had not been going well at all until K. arrived. Barnabas had been waiting in vain in an office in the Castle for months before he was given his first letter, the letter which he delivered to K. at the Inn. When K. leaves, he finds his assistant, Jeremias. He tells K. that Frieda was so upset by K.'s long, unexplained absence that she has decided to leave him and be with him, Jeremias, instead. While they are arguing, Barnabas arrives with a message inviting K. to see Erlanger, one of Klamm's secretaries, at the Gentleman's Inn. K. goes and accidentally stumbles into the room of another secretary named Buergel. K. is so tired that he is barely able to remain conscious while Buergel explains the best way to extract favors from the Castle, information which should be vitally important to K. but which is probably lost on him. He is called to the next room by Erlanger who orders him to convince Frieda to take her position back in the taproom and then leaves. He is still incredibly tired and is allowed by the landlord—who is frustrated that K. had lingered so long at all in the first place—to

sleep in a barrel in the taproom. When he wakes up twelve hours later, he talks to Pepi's, Frieda's replacement who is going to be forced to return to being a chambermaid. Pepi does not like Frieda and argues that Frieda never really loved K. but only married him for attention. She offers to let K. stay with her and the other chambermaids in the Inn and K. accepts. The landlady, seeing that he is finally awake, begins to chastise him for a "cheeky" comment he made before he went to sleep. Afterwards, the inn's coachman, hoping to exploit K.'s apparent connection with Erlanger, tells K. he can stay with him and his family. K. accepts. The story then ends in the middle of a sentence.

Chapter I: Arrival and Chapter II: Barnabas

Chapter I: Arrival and Chapter II: Barnabas Summary

K. arrives late in the day at the village outside of the Castle after a long journey. He stumbles into an inn and goes to sleep but, before long, he is woken up by a man named Schwarzer who tells him that he does not have permission to be there. He tells him that he is the land surveyor summoned by the Count. Schwarzer is still suspicious and calls the Castle to confirm his story. Initially, the Castle says that they are not expecting any land surveyor but they soon receive a call correcting their mistake. K. goes back to sleep and wakes up early the next morning. The village is covered with snow but he notices that the snow seems to thin nearer to the Castle. He decides to go up to it and actually finds it rather unimpressive. For all the respect that it gets paid, it really is quite ordinary.

On his way up, K. meets a teacher and asks him a few questions about the Castle. He asks the teacher if he can call on him sometime, since he feels out of place in the village. The teacher says he can. K. continues on his way and, when he turns on a road that leads uphill towards the Castle, finds the snow very difficult and taxing. Exhausted, he steps into one of the houses on the side of the road. The inhabitants seem to all know him by reputation—he is the much talked-about land surveyor—but they are not eager to take him in. They are a strange collection of people: there are a few men bathing, several children running around, a particular striking, sickly-looking woman gazing into the distance while she nurses her child. K. sits down and dozes off to sleep but is rudely awoken before long and sent on his way. He goes back outside and sees two peculiar, identical men with thick black beards walking, they tell him, to the inn. Intimidated by the snow, K. takes a sleigh back to the inn and sees the two men, whose names, he discovers, are Artur and Jeremias; they are his assistants, though they do not know anything about land surveying.

K. tells his new assistants—whom he has decided to refer to collectively as just Artur, since he cannot distinguish them—to prepare a sleigh for a journey to the Castle tomorrow. They inform him that they will need permission to go to the Castle. He tells them to obtain such permission, but they receive only an emphatic "no" when they call. K.'s fortune is not any better when he tries himself. An impressive looking young boy named Barnabas enters with a letter for K. The letter, from K.'s director, a man named Klamm, promises to accommodate him as much as possible and tells him to report to the village chairman. The letter indicates that Barnabas will convey any necessary communication to and from the Castle, when necessary. K. studies the letter further—he is troubled by its implications, which seem quite ambiguous—but finally decides that the meaning of the letter is whatever he makes of it. He is not happy, however, with having Barnabas deliver messages back and forth, for he worries that it will not be effective. He first tells Barnabas to convey that to the Castle but then thinks better of it. K. decides to

go with Barnabas, thinking that they will go the Castle, but instead they wind up at Barnabas' house. There he meets Barnabas' decrepit parents and his two sisters, Amalia and Olga. He is invited to eat with them but first accompanies Olga to the Gentlemen's Inn. When they arrive, he discovers that Klamm is staying there.

Chapter I: Arrival and Chapter II: Barnabas Analysis

The reader will immediately be struck by the surreal setting and characters of the novels, one of the defining characteristics of Kafka's writings. Characters are usually not well-developed at all and, in fact, Kafka's style really prevents them from having definite characteristics anyway, since the characters act in a way that is intended (by Kafka) to be totally unpredictable to the reader. If the characters had well-defined tendencies or personalities, the reader would expect them to act in accordance with them.

It should be clear to the reader that there is not any notion of a "straight man" in the story. That is, it should not be thought that K. is the one normal person in the insane world of the Castle; rather, he is just as bizarre as everyone else. His only difference is that he is not yet acquainted with the Castle's various rules and seems almost too ready to defy them. However, he does not express the kind of shock—or even horror—that a real person might experience in his situation. When the villagers are constantly creeping around him, trying to hear what he is saying, he swats them away like they were flies.

One wonders if Kramm's letter to K. is meant to be a brief interjection of literary theory. K. is, at first, confused by the meaning of the letter and finds several ways to interpret it. From one angle, the letter seems to place him alongside the other castle dignitaries. From another angle, it seems to place him squarely among the peasants. His ultimate conclusion is that the truth is whatever he thinks it to be; it is up to him to choose an interpretation. Such an interpretive strategy may very well be the strategy Kafka believes suits his own literature—and perhaps all literature. Certainly, there is plenty of room in the chaotic narrative for readers to disagree and Kafka seems to imply that such disagreement is not only legitimate but, perhaps, intended by the author.

Chapter III: Frieda and Chapter IV: First Conversation with the Landlady

Chapter III: Frieda and Chapter IV: First Conversation with the Landlady Summary

K. accompanies Olga into the inn's taproom and meets Frieda, a blond woman who is in charge of serving beer. The woman has a peculiar gaze, as if she could see into his soul and knew him better than he even knew himself. K. asks her if she knows Klamm and Frieda just asks if he would like to see him. K. looks through a peephole in the wall and sees a rather large, bespectacled man sitting over a desk. K. asks Frieda if she knows Klamm very well and says that she is actually his mistress. He praises her ambition and accomplishment—being the mistress of an official like Klamm is quite an honor. The two of them hit it off immediately and quickly make plans for Frieda to leave Klamm for him. When everyone has left, they two make love on the floor of the taproom. Afterwards, a voice from Klamm's room cries out Frieda's name, but she ignores him. K.'s assistants, at some point, have sneaked into the taproom and the four of them return to K.'s inn.

K. wakes up and is annoyed to discover his assistants huddled around him. He sends them away so he can talk to Frieda alone. Frieda and K. lay down together and embrace, kiss, and even lick one another. Some maids come into the room, and disgusted by their behavior, throw a sheet on top of them. K. pulls himself out and discovers the inn's landlady—who, it turns out, is also Frieda's mother—sitting there waiting to talk to him. He tries to put off the conversation so he can go visit the village chairman, but she insists that her business is more important since it regards the happiness of her daughter. K. tells her that he plans to marry Frieda as soon as it is possible. He tells her that he plans to talk to Klamm as soon as possible, but the landlady tells him that it is impossible. An official, she explains, only talks to people he wants to, and he would never waste time talking to a stranger like K. K. explains that he would like to talk to Klamm in order to make sure there are no hard feelings about his marriage to Frieda. She insists that Klamm could not care less about what someone like K. does. She goes on and tells him that she does not particularly like him, either, and the only reason he was allowed to stay there in the first place is because she was too tired to kick him out when he arrived. She tells him he should be grateful he is allowed to remain there, for, she says, he would have nowhere else to go. He mentions that he could stay with Barnabas if he wanted, and she scoffs. Barnabas's family, evidently, has a horrible reputation in the village and he should not be proud of associating with them. K. tires of the conversation and starts to leave. She urges him once again to not attempt to talk to Klamm. He asks if it is really for his protection that she does not want him to try to talk to Klamm; perhaps, he suggests, it is for Klamm's sake. She is silent.

Chapter III: Frieda and Chapter IV: First Conversation with the Landlady Analysis

One of the chief problems in the novel so far is the question of hierarchy. There seems to be an immense gulf between the common peasant and the Castle official. The gulf is large enough that people constantly discourage K. from trying to go to the Castle or talk to Castle officials, like Klamm. Not even Frieda, Klamm's mistress, talks to him. The Castle also has laid down a number of regulations which seem intended to ensure that Castle officials bother with the peasants as little as possible. Thus, for example, non-officials are not allowed to stay at the Gentleman's Inn, not even if they sleep on the floor, for an official might accidentally see one.

It would be incorrect to assume K.'s situation is exactly the same as a peasant's however. The landlady points out that he belongs neither to the Castle nor the village. She concludes, therefore, that he is nothing, but it is not immediately clear that this is a bad thing. In a certain sense, K. is outside of the rules of the town or, at least, he believes he is. He does not have the same awe for the Castle that everyone else seems to have and this emboldens him to test the laws. He does not seem to fear any kind of punishment for his actions—indeed, at one point, he says that the idea of violence in such a town seemed absurd to him. This implies that the force of the customs is derived merely from the fact that they are customs. As an outsider, this has no weight upon him. Indeed, there is some suggestion that the villagers are fooled in their awe of the Castle. K. notes that, as he approaches the Castle, it really is quite dilapidated and unimpressive. Further, when he leaves the landlady, there is the suggestion that the custom is not so much to protect the villagers, but to protect the Castle nobles: yet, as they have been prevented so far, they should be more or less invincible to any injury from someone outside of the court.

Chapter V: At the Chairman's and Chapter VI: Second Conversation with the Landlady

Chapter V: At the Chairman's and Chapter VI: Second Conversation with the Landlady Summary

K. visits the village chairman, his superior according to the letter from Klamm. He is surprised that he is not more nervous about it. He expects to be able to obtain his wishes from the Castle, through the chairman, rather easily. He enters the chairman's house and finds him, bedridden with gout. His wife, Mizzi, busies herself around the room while the two discuss and says nothing until directly addressed. The chairman explains that there has been a bureaucratic error and that the the kingdom does not, in fact, need a land surveyor. He says that the bureaucracy makes so few mistakes that they tend not to check for them and that K.'s case—which he insists is incredibly minor in comparison to the lofty affairs of the Castle—just happened to slip through the crack. K. is upset, for he gave up his livelihood at home and went through quite a bit of effort to come and, moreover, he is engaged to marry one of the town's residents, Frieda. The chairman embarks on a rather complicated explanation of the exact nature of the error and tries to locate the document which would, supposedly, shed light on the affair, but his wife (assisted by K.'s servants who, as always, are under foot) is unable to find it. When K. protests that he spoke to Castle officials directly over the phone about the matter, the chairman dismisses it. He explains that the telephone system is really just a kind of joke that people at the Castle use for their amusement. One never actually talks to who he thinks he is calling. The chairman promises to contact the Castle on K.'s behalf and hopefully obtain some generosity, but K. is still unsatisfied. He feels that the Castle owes him more than that and leaves.

When K. returns to his inn he is met by the landlord who has asked whether he has found new lodgings and explains that his wife, the landlady, has been very sick and upset on his account and wants him to leave. K. goes to visit her and finds out that the landlord was not being honest. Apparently, he resents his wife and therefore does whatever is contrary to her wishes. For example, when she did not want to take K. in as a resident, he allowed him in. Now that she is happy that K. is staying there—though she insists that her negative opinion of him has not changed—he wants to get rid of him.

The landlady shows him an old, barely intelligible photograph of the messenger Klamm first sent for her when she was his mistress. Though he only called on her three times, she still proudly bears the title of Klamm's mistress and cherishes the few gifts that he gave to her. Frieda never got any gifts, she explains, not because Klamm liked her less, but because she never asked. Klamm is too important to spontaneously gifts on his

own, but is generous enough when someone asks him. K. is a bit disturbed by this attachment for it makes him worry that Frieda will also continue to think fondly of Klamm. The landlady explains that there need not be any such rivalry; a wife can remain faithful to her husband, as she has done, while still cherishing her memories of being the mistress of someone like Klamm. K. then asks how she met her husband. She explains that he—whose name, she tells him, is Hans—consoled her after Klamm stopped calling on her and married her. Hans' uncle then offered to lease the inn to them at a very cheap price and they immediately accepted. The venture turned out to be quite profitable, but only because of her effort—Hans is a very lazy man. K. suspects aloud that Klamm must have had something to do with the marriage, because it would not make any sense otherwise for the new couple to be offered the inn on such favorable terms. Hans' uncle would surely know he was lazy and knew nothing about his wife and could not, therefore, expect them to have much success. K. further points out that the marriage must really not be ideal from Hans' perspective, not because of any defect in his wife, but because it would be better if he were her first love and did not have to come after such a distinguished man like Klamm. He concludes, then, that Hans and his family must have hoped to obtain some kind of blessing from Klamm, but failed to do so only because they never asked. K. then expresses his desire—no matter what objections have been raised—to meet Klamm. He intends to make sure matters are set straight about his marriage to Frieda and, if the course of conversation allows for it, he will ask Klamm for some favors. The landlady offers to request such a meeting through the proper channels, but K. refuses, for he would carry out his plans regardless. If the landlady asked for permission and was denied, then K. would seem rebellious.

Chapter V: At the Chairman's and Chapter VI: Second Conversation with the Landlady Analysis

The absurd complexity of the Castle's bureaucracy's is one of the prominent features of the fifth chapter. As the chairman depicts the situation, the seemingly thousands of employees at the Castle are constantly working, quite busily, to file away enormous amounts of paperwork on matters which he insists are of the highest importance. Yet, it is difficult to imagine what exactly they could be doing. Though, Kafka never gives any idea of the size of the town, in terms of population—and, indeed, providing such details would really be contrary to his style—it is doubtful that there is anything that justifies such a vast amount of work. And, yet, despite the absurdity of the bureaucracies, the chairman and everyone else seem to be in total awe of it. There, is perhaps, a suggestion of political satire here. The book was written in the first quarter of the twentieth century, a time which saw the rise of large, bureaucratic governments. At the same time, nationalist movements were gaining force and governments enjoyed a kind of idolization which they might only have dreamed of in previous eras. The similarities to the attitudes of the villagers, which are, admittedly, grotesque and exaggerated, are too many to be merely coincidental.

K.'s conversation with the landlady in the sixth chapter is a great example of how incoherent the plot is at times, though of course this incoherence is completely

intentional. K.'s line of questioning, at first, really seems both rude and pointless. He has no reason to ask the landlady how she came to marry Hans. After the conversation, of course, he finds a new grounds for going to see Klamm (though, receiving favors still seems to be a secondary aim, behind sorting out his marriage with Frieda), but that could not justify, in retrospect, his starting the conversation in the first place. To put the situation another way, the beginning of the conversation is paradoxically justified by its conclusion and this kind of backward logic is characteristic both of the book and Kafka's work in general.

Chapter VII: The Teacher and Chapter VIII: Waiting for Klamm

Chapter VII: The Teacher and Chapter VIII: Waiting for Klamm Summary

K. goes to his room and finds the teacher there waiting for him. The teacher reproaches him for treating the chairman rudely and, when K. asks how he could possibly know how he treated the chairman, he explains that he does not know directly, but that he recorded a deposition of the conversation and could only conclude that, while the chairman was kind, helpful, and generous, K. was completely uncivil. Nonetheless, the chairman still wants to help K. out, if for no other reason than that he fears K. will act rashly otherwise. The teacher proudly announces that the chairman has offered K. the position of school janitor. The offer is really a great favor to him, for the school has no need of a janitor. K. is unmoved by the gesture, though, and immediately refuses. Frieda takes him aside and urges him to reconsider. She explains that her mother has decided to kick him out of the house because she is embarrassed that she disclosed so much personal information to him. If nothing else, the position as janitor will give them a place to live until he can find something else. K. returns to the teacher and informs him that he will accept the post. After the teacher leaves, K. kisses Frieda and heads off to try to meet Klamm.

K. goes to the Gentlemen's Inn in order to find Klamm. He goes into the taproom and looks for the peephole where he first saw Klamm, but is unable to find it. When he strikes a match to provide some light, he startles Frieda's replacement, a young girl named Pepi. She tells him that no one is staying in that room anymore and that Klamm is getting ready to leave. He is packing his sleigh up in the inn's courtyard. K. rushes to the courtyard and finds the sleigh, but only the coachman is in the sleigh. Evidently, Klamm has not yet come down. K. asks when Klamm will come and the coachman responds cryptically, implying that it will not be until he, K., has left. Finally, the coachman breaks the silence and asks K. to retrieve some cognac in the coach. K. slips into the sleigh, which is luxuriously comfortable and warm, and lingers a bit before returning with the liquor. After a bit, a gentleman, though not Klamm, comes down and tries to lure K. away. K. refuses, though, and instead they tow the sleigh and horses back into the stable. While he sits in the courtyard alone, K. feels a kind of lonely freedom from the town's regulations.

Chapter VII: The Teacher and Chapter VIII: Waiting for Klamm Analysis

The eighth chapter perpetuates two important themes that have already been established in the book. First, it sheds a little more light on the uncertain nature of the

village's hierarchy. It was already suggested, back in chapter IV, that the separation of the officials from everyone else is really to protect the officials. The fact that Klamm is seemingly unwilling to go to his sleigh while K. is out there seems to affirm this. It does not seem that Klamm is motivated by any kind of arrogant unwillingness to be in the vicinity of someone like K., for if that were the case, he could, presumably, just have K. moved. The young gentleman's attempt to lure K. away has almost the sense of desperation; there is no real force behind the request. Klamm can do nothing but give up when K. decides to stubbornly wait for him. Why exactly Klamm is afraid is not yet clear.

Once again, however, it should be remembered that K. is not a villager and therefore what happens to him need not reflect what would happen to, say, Hans, if he were to do the same thing. As a stranger, K. seems to enjoy a unique freedom to transgress the laws of the town and the officials are more or less helpless. K. has a strong sense of this freedom as he stands alone and unbothered in the inn's courtyard but, at the same time, feels a certain kind of desperation in the freedom. Perhaps he realizes that being outside of the town's law, he is also separated from everyone else in the city and, therefore, is truly alone. On the other hand, it may be that K. has realized how senseless the laws were in the first place. If the laws were meaningless then transgressing them has no value either.

Chapter IX: The Struggle Against the Interrogation and Chapter X: On the Street

Chapter IX: The Struggle Against the Interrogation and Chapter X: On the Street Summary

K. finally decides to leave the courtyard and goes back into the Gentlemen's Inn. The young gentleman who had tried to beckon him away from Klamm's sleigh is inside, seemingly waiting for him. The gentleman he discovers, is Momus, Klamm's village secretary. Also present are the landlord and landlady from K.'s inn. They tell K. that Klamm has left, apparently immediately after he vacated the courtyard. Momus is interested in talking to K. to fill out a few details about what happened. K. is not interested in the interrogation, but the landlady encourages him to do so. She insists that Klamm will never talk to him if he does not want to (and, evidently, he does not want to) and that taking part in an official interrogation by Klamm's secretary is the next best thing. It is true, she must admit, that Klamm will never read the deposition and, in all likelihood will never even know the contents, but since Momus is his secretary, all of his actions are, so to speak, imbued with Klamm's spirit. K. is unconvinced and leaves.

The weather outside has become rather inclement. After he takes a few difficult steps, he sees his two assistants and Barnabas walking on the road ahead of him. They walk with him back to the schoolhouse. On the way, Barnabas gives K. a letter from Klamm. In the letter he praises K. and his assistants for their good, diligent work surveying the land. K. makes Barnabas promise to take a message for him back to Klamm asking for permission to come to the Castle and discuss the work in person. He points out that any attempt to communicate through intermediaries has failed miserably so far, as evidenced by the fact that Klamm does not even know that no work has been done.

Chapter IX: The Struggle Against the Interrogation and Chapter X: On the Street Analysis

K. continues his rebellion against the village's regulations in chapter IX. Momus wants to interrogate him about the event that happened in the courtyard, but K. refuses; he thinks it is a waste of time. It does not seem that K. is worried about getting in trouble—and, indeed, he never really has worried about being punished—for Momus seems only to be performing yet another pointless bureaucratic exercise. He just wants to fill in a few details in the deposition which is going to be filed away and, in all likelihood, never seen again. The only possible interest K. could have in humoring Momus is because of his connection with Klamm, and this is the substance of the landlady's argument. The fact that K. does not even care about this is interesting. K. has moved on from wanting to

contact K. through the proper channels. He wants to meet K. on his own terms and does not care if that means he will have to break regulations.

The setting of chapter nine is somewhat bizarre. By all appearances, K. is in the Gentlemen's Inn. The reader knows that there is where he went to see Klamm in the first place and he has already met Pepi, Frieda's replacement at the inn. There seems to be no reason not to believe that the Gentlemen's Inn is where K. returns in chapter nine. Pepi is there, as is the young gentleman. Further, as the reader knows from chapter two, there is a considerable distance between the Bridge Inn and the Gentlemen's Inn and there is no indication that K. traveled any great distance. Yet, it is never explained why the landlady is present. In all likelihood, there is no explanation and her presence is simply a facet of Kafka's bizarre universe.

Chapter XI: The Schoolhouse and Chapter XII: The Assistants

Chapter XI: The Schoolhouse and Chapter XII: The Assistants Summary

K. and his assistants return to the schoolhouse. They have set up their lodgings in the school's gymnasium, a space too large to effectively keep warm. K. is still frustrated and annoyed with his assistants and Frieda, who has so far been much more patient with them, agrees that, innocent though they might be, it is probably best to send them away. K. decides he will find some way to do just that, though the assistants are rather stubborn in their insistence to keep serving him. After eating, they are all very tired but have difficulty sleeping. Sometime during the night, a cat jumps on Frieda and wakes her up. She gets up and goes looking for it and, in her absence, one of the assistants lays down in her place at K.'s side. When he wakes up and discovers this, K. punches the assistant hard enough to make him cry. No one is able to go back to sleep because it is too cold, so they take an ax and chop down one of the wooden doors for fuel (the teacher strictly forbade them from using the school's ample supply of wood). They huddle around the fire and are able to sleep for awhile, but are awoken by the schoolmistress, Gisa, who is upset that they have slept so late in the day and that they have broken down one of the doors. The assistants immediately report that it was K. who broke down the door and fail to acknowledge their own involvement. The teacher fires K. but he refuses to leave. He says that the job was given to him by the chairman and, as such, only the chairman has the authority to fire him.

K. makes the assistants leave, but they do not go without a fight. They bang at the doors, walls, and windows, begging to come back in. The assistants eventually get tired, though, and stop pounding. K. apologizes to Frieda for taking her away from the Gentlemen's Inn and Klamm, and Frieda is sad that she left, too, but only because she feels unworthy to be with K. She apologizes for all the trouble she put him through and asks if they can leave the town and go live somewhere abroad. She feels that she cannot fully love him there because there is "too much Klamm" and that people are constantly "tearing" at her. He asks if she means that she is still in contact with Klamm, but she explains that she only means the assistants remind of her Klamm and says that, in her thoughts, she refers to them as "Klamm's emissaries." She claims the assistants really do not want K., but her, and points to various examples of their behavior which confirm this, including trying to get K. in trouble for chopping the door down. She says, though, that regardless of how much she despises them, it is perhaps best if K. lets them back in because they are perhaps his best way of getting to Klamm. He refuses and says that, even if they are somehow connected with Klamm, he seems to be indifferent about them, because, as his most recent letter indicates, he seems to be completely ignorant of what they have been doing. He tells her that he does not think

the assistants are responsible for her sensing Klamm everywhere, but, rather, it is her own, lingering attachment to him.

Chapter XI: The Schoolhouse and Chapter XII: The Assistants Analysis

These two chapters shed more light on the exact nature of K.'s assistants. So far, they have been little more than a nuisance. They are constantly poking around in K.'s business and seem almost too eager to serve him, though they generally are not very good at executing his orders. In a lot of ways, they have, so far, been simply background characters who provide an occasional distraction from what K. is doing. This effect is probably intentional because that is probably how their presence seems to K. He is annoyed by them, but he does not give them a great deal of thought. However, in both of these chapters, but especially chapter twelve, it starts to seem as if their presence might not be entirely benign. First, they try to get K. in trouble for chopping down the door. Second, Frieda discloses how they seem to desire her and are almost jealous of K. She notes how they watch them have sex and are constantly trying to get rid of him so they can have her to themselves. She even thinks they might be agents of Klamm and points to the fact that when K. first saw them they were coming downhill from the Castle as being evidence in support of her theory.

Chapter XIII: Hans and Chapter XIV: Frieda's Reproach

Chapter XIII: Hans and Chapter XIV: Frieda's Reproach Summary

: K. hears a knock at the door and finds one of the children he saw at the master tanner's outside. He is evidently supposed to be attending class but sneaked out in order to help K. They talk briefly about his family. K. discovers his mother is the sick woman he saw with the peculiar gaze and finds out that she has either been to the Castle herself or at least probably has connections there. He feels bad for K. because he saw the schoolteacher had scolded him, but K. assures him that it really does not affect him. Hans asks if can be of any other use, but K. assures him that he cannot be. Before he leaves, though, K. returns to the subject of the boy's mother. He tells Hans he possesses a good amount of medical knowledge and even has treated patients before; he suggests that he might be able to help his mother. They set up a plot for K. to visit when his father goes away. They hope that, if Hans' father should return, K. will be able to convince him not to be angry at him, since he was one of the people in the village who wanted to summon a land surveyor in the first place.

The teacher comes in not long after Hans leaves and scolds K. for not tidying up the room. K. points out that, at least according to the teacher, he has been fired, but the teacher glumly implies that the chairman seems to have sided with K. K. and Frieda get to work but, after working silently for a few minutes, detects something is bothering his fiance and asks her if anything is wrong. She is hesitant to say, but she finally admits that the warnings her mother gave her about him are starting to sound more plausible to her. She noticed how K. managed to act as if his only concern was Hans' mother's health, but in reality he was only interested in gaining access to the Castle. The landlady had told her that K. was only interested in her because of her connection to Klamm and that K. would immediately dispose of her if it would help him get whatever it is that he wants from Klamm. At first, Frieda did not think that K. was capable of this kind of deceit, but the conversation with the boy forces her to wonder. K. disputes what the landlady said but points out that it is only a bad thing if Frieda does not love him. For, if K. is simply using his relationship with Frieda to get ahead, as long as Frieda is happy, there is no loser in the situation and both benefit. The same is true with Hans: if his plan goes according to plan, K. will gain access to the Castle and Hans' mother will be cured. K. leaves, despite Frieda's pleas for him to stay, to finish an errand for the teacher. As he is walking out, he sees one of his assistants—where the other one is, he does not know—and scares him off.

Chapter XIII: Hans and Chapter XIV: Frieda's Reproach Analysis

One of the main features of this chapter is K.'s manipulative nature. This has already been seen, to some extent, in his conversation with some other characters, most notably the landlady, but here it is, perhaps, the most clear. K. has no real interest in helping Hans or his mother, but merely values them insofar as they can help gain access to the Castle. He is able to seize upon Hans' mothers' illness and his own medical knowledge as a way of ingratiating himself with them. It is only natural that Frieda would be concerned upon observing this. Her mother had already told her that K. did not really love her and was only using her for her supposed connection to Klamm and, indeed, there is perhaps something to the landlady's claim. K., so far, seems to be entirely focused on reaching Klamm and obtaining some so far undisclosed favor from him and there is no reason to think Frieda is an exception to this rule. Further, K. really makes no attempt to defend himself from this accusation but instead points out that it should not really worry Frieda. If she is happy for him, she should not care why he wants to be with her. Strangely enough, this argument seems to console her; at least, it does not outrage her like one might think it should.

Chapter XV: At Amalia's and Chapter XVI

Chapter XV: At Amalia's and Chapter XVI Summary

Chapter XV: After he finishes his day's chores, K. returns to the schoolhouse and finds Frieda bathing Gisa's cat. K. learns that Schwarzer, the man who suspected him of trespassing when he first arrived in the village, is Gisa's suitor, though she does not appear to feel the same way for him. K. still has not heard from Barnabas regarding Klamm and decides to pay a visit to his household. When he arrives, he finds the two disabled parents half-dozing at the table. Olga and Barnabas are nowhere to be seen, but Amalia is resting. He is about to leave—for he had only come to see Barnabas—but Amalia urges him to wait for Olga. She says that Olga is secretly in love with him. K. doubts her and says he has a fianc

e, anyway. Amalia is undeterred, though, and further claims that K. only uses Barnabas as a pretext to come visit them. Olga returns and K. is all the more eager to leave and, in his haste, accidentally invites the two of them to visit him at the schoolhouse some time. They accept but he is forced to immediately retract the situation, given his fianc

es dislike for their family. Amalia says they were only joking anyway, but tells him that he will have to come visit them more frequently because, from now on, Barnabas will never deliver messages to K. at the schoolhouse. K. will have to come to the house to get them. She tells him that, for now, she cannot tell him anything about Barnabas, but Olga can, because she is his confidant.

Chapter XVI: Olga tells K. that Amalia is the head of the family and takes upon herself the majority of the family's responsibilities and burdens. Both she and Barnabas are completely obedient to her. K. is confused by this because Amalia does not seem to like the fact that Barnabas is a servant and, apparently, she does not know what he does. Olga explains that Barnabas wants to keep his job as messenger for status. It does not pay well (or, perhaps, at all) and he earns a good income as an apprentice to Brunswick, the shoemaker. However, none of that can compete with the dignity of working for the Castle, even if it is in a low capacity. She tells him, though, that Barnabas is unsure whether he really is working as a messenger. He suspects that the whole thing is a sham. He is not sure, for example, whether the man he sees who is supposedly Klamm is really the official himself or someone merely standing in his place. This possibility is all the more plausible because there seems to be no kind of consensus about Klamm's appearance. Indeed, he seems to constantly be changing. Moreover, Barnabas never even speaks to this supposed Klamm anyway. After waiting in the office—sometimes for days—he is given a letter from one of the clerks in the office. The letters are always pulled from some bundle of old letters and, therefore, do not really represent any kind of communication between Klamm and their recipient. K. is reluctant to believe Barnabas' tales. He says that the boy is still very young and is probably liable to either not understand what is happening or even imagine things that are not there. Moreover, he can hardly be expected to discharge his duties well, either.

Olga says that she understands his points but that, given the peculiar situation of their family, Barnabas feels compelled to work at the Castle. K. says he only has the vaguest idea of the family's secret.

Chapter XV: At Amalia's and Chapter XVI Analysis

The reader will likely note that Chapter XVI, unlike all preceding chapters, is untitled. There is probably no more significance to this fact than that Kafka merely had neglected to title it. It is a reminder of the fact that the book was never completed. The same is true for the book's final five chapters.

Kafka leaves it open-ended, at least for now, whether Barnabas' stories from the Castle should be trusted or not. On the one hand, at least one part of his strange story has been confirmed by others, namely, Klamm's variable appearance. Olga, though she has not seen Klamm directly, has heard enough from others to come to this conclusion on her own. On the other hand, there does appear to be evidence that K. is actually receiving letters from Klamm, for the village chairman confirmed that the signature Klamm's signature as he knows it. Of course, Barnabas could be wrong about some parts of his stories or could simply be interpreting it incorrectly.

Chapter XVII: Amalia's Secret and Chapter XVIII: Amalia's Punishment

Chapter XVII: Amalia's Secret and Chapter XVIII: Amalia's Punishment Summary

Olga tells K. the story about how her family fell into such disrepute. The Castle held a festival one day for the fire department and one of the officials, Sortini (not to be confused with the industrious Sordini who dealt with K.'s case) was there. While the family was looking at a fire engine the Castle had donated to the village, Sortini, evidently fascinated by Amalia, approached her. The family misinterpreted his motion and thought he wanted to speak to all of them and so they all approached, led by the father. Annoyed, he sent them all away. The next day, Amalia sent a vulgar letter from Sortini ordering her to come to the Gentlemen's Inn. The aim of the letter seemed to be to insult her and Amalia was so upset that she tore the letter up and threw it in the messenger's face. She never went to the Inn as instructed.

Amalia's disobedience became the big news in town and nearly everyone came by to see the family for themselves. The father—who worked in the fire department and was perhaps in line for an appointment at the Castle—had his diploma taken away. Olga suspects that if the family had tried, they could have restored their position in the village. People and families had been disgraced before and, generally, it was never a permanent condition. However, the family did nothing because Amalia, who had somehow seized authority over the family, chose not to take any action. As a result, the village's contempt became permanent. The family was forced to move out of their large house and move to their current, much smaller cottage.

Chapter XVII: Amalia's Secret and Chapter XVIII: Amalia's Punishment Analysis

These chapters reinforce K.'s intuition that the Castle will never take any kind of direct, violent action against anyone. Criminal punishment, at least so far, has been completely absent and this fact must surely encourage K. in his quest to talk to Klamm. He cannot really fear any serious consequences. At most, he will be a social outcast, but he is not from the village anyway. It is worth speculating whether this fact is what makes the officials so frightened by him. They avoid the villagers because they feel they are superior to them and, as such, their avoidance is not absolute. Officials are seen, from time to time, interacting with villagers and even employee some villagers in relatively important positions. Klamm, however, is completely unwilling to see K. and it seems that it is from fear. The nature of this fear is slightly more understandable. K. is outside of the law because its only threat seems to be social censure and, therefore, he can act as boldly towards the officials as he desires.

Chapter XIX: Petitioning and Chapter XX: Olga's Plans

Chapter XIX: Petitioning and Chapter XX: Olga's Plans Summary

Though it seemed too late to be any good, her father finally arose out of his inaction and decided to start petitioning the Castle to try to get the judgment against them overturned and, thereby, restore their good reputation. He met with little success, however. It was difficult to get into the Castle at all and, even when he did, they would usually just send him right back out. His only hope was to bribe the officials, a practice which was tolerated, but really had no positive outcome for the briber. There really was little hope for their cause anyone, for the Castle had never issued any kind of formal judgment on the matter. They could not pardon him for a crime for which he had (in their eyes) never been convicted. When the family's money ran out, the father took to camping outside the Castle gates and hoping to have his cause heard by some passing by official. Due to the erratic traffic patterns coming in and out of the Castle, however, this plan, too, was fated not to work.

Seeing that her father was wasting himself away camping outside of the Castle gates—he developed the rheumatism which now disables him while waiting out in the cold—Olga devised a different plan. Since the Castle had never formally charged them with any crime, she figured that the matter really rested with Sortini's affronted servant. If they could obtain his pardon, she reasoned, then there would be nothing left to cause their pardon. Sortini, however, never came into town anymore, but they thought that if they spent enough time at the Gentlemen's Inn they would eventually see the servant. Officials often exchanged servants, so it was quite possible. They never did find the servant, but Olga and Barnabas made a number of contacts during this time and were able to get a job for Barnabas as messenger. They put so much stock in Barnabas' job because it is the only good news their family has had in years. In fact, up until K.'s arrival, Barnabas' job had been completely idle; his first and only letters were ones from Klamm to K.

After Olga finishes telling K. this story, a loud knock is heard at the door and only with great difficulty is Olga able to send off the mysterious visitor. Olga tells him that the visitor was one of his assistants who had been sent by Frieda. K. decides to take his leave. He takes a willow switch from Olga and sneaks out the back of the house, meaning to punish the assistant with the weapon. When he is on the street, he calls out and the assistant comes to him. It is Jeremias who looks much older now—he explains that when he is united with his twin, neither age, or at least age more slowly. He tells K. that he and Artur have filed a formal complaint against him and no longer consider themselves under his service. During the explanation, he casually mentions that he was assigned to the post not by Klamm but by Galater, Klamm's temporary substitute.

Jeremias tells him that Frieda was crushed by his disappearance and that he convinced her to be with him, instead. They both now work at the Gentlemen's Inn. Jeremias works as a waiter and Frieda resumed her old post in the taproom.

Chapter XIX: Petitioning and Chapter XX: Olga's Plans Analysis

These chapters and the four preceding chapters highlight another part of K's freedom. He is the only person in the village who is able to visit Barnabas' family. This freedom has two aspects. First of all, he is free to do so because he does not care about the village's opinion and does not look down on Barnabas and his family because of it (he does not like Amalia, but he has his own reasons for that). Second, by visiting them, he shares in their ill reputation. The landlady of Bridge Inn and Frieda have both already rebuked him for visiting that family, but K., as always, does not care.

It is somewhat curious what K.'s motive in spending so much time with Olga is, however. It is probably true that he is not attracted to her, as he insists and, in any case, his attraction seems to be largely influenced by the usefulness of the person in question. He has basically admitted as much regarding Frieda, and was not ashamed to say it. What use Olga and her family could have to K. is not at all clear. Barnabas' service as messenger is of some use to him, but there is no reason why he would need to have a long conversation with Olga. Barnabas will discharge his duty either way. The story she tells K. could only have the most limited use for K. K. already doubts the veracity of the stories Barnabas tells about the Castle and Olga really knows nothing her self. Moreover, the family is perhaps the worst-situated in the entire village to help him obtain any favors from the Castle. Yet, it would be out of character for K. to talk to Olga if he did not think she was somehow of use to him. (Indeed, K. insists to Frieda that his conversation with Olga did, in fact, serve this goal.) There is perhaps no clear answer to this puzzle, and it may be that K. is simply waiting an absurd amount of time for the letter from Barnabas, even if such an explanation is not a very satisfying one.

Chapter XXI and Chapter XXII

Chapter XXI and Chapter XXII Summary

K. tells Jeremias that he plans to get Frieda back and predicts that it will only take a few words to convince her whatever lies Jeremias told her are wrong. As they argue, Barnabas arrives, evidently with some good news. K. is disappointed to find out it is not a letter Klamm—though not for a lack of effort on Barnabas' part—but instead a message from one of Klamm's secretaries, Erlanger. Without saying what for, he wants to meet K. in the Gentlemen's Inn. Upon hearing this news, Jeremias races off to the inn and K. runs after him. There is a large crowd of people waiting outside the inn, all of whom apparently have an appointment with Erlanger. K. has the good fortune to be one of the first called in. However, when he goes up to Erlanger's room, the latter is sleeping and they must wait for him to wake up.

While K. waits, he sees Frieda tending to rooms. Apparently Pepi has not yet given up her post as hostess in the taproom and, in the meantime, Frieda has become a chambermaid. He runs to her and embraces her. He explains the situation with Barnabas and his family and promises that he was in no way unfaithful to her. Amalia, after all, is so reserved that no man could really approach her and Olga, though much more friendly, is certainly not attractive. Frieda is consoled by his explanation and even seems willing to take him back. However, when she sees Jeremias and goes to him—she is tending to him because he has become ill—she instantly changes her mind and declares that she wants nothing more to do with K.

Chapter XXI and Chapter XXII Analysis

One common pattern with the village's bureaucracy is that everything takes time, an enormous amount of time. Whether it is the delivering of messages, a simple phone call (the reader will recall that K. had to wait an absurdly long time when he phoned the Castle early in the book), or meeting with a secretary, nothing is ever quick or easy. Kafka seems to be seizing upon one of the most familiar aspects of dealing with the government and exaggerating to reproduce a frustration that the reader, in all likelihood, has already experienced himself. Of course, the Castle seems ridiculously inefficient in other ways—the endless depositions, the thousands upon thousands of forms, and so on—but its slowness is the one that is most frequently depicted.

Chapter XXIII and Chapter XXIV

Chapter XXIII and Chapter XXIV Summary

K. is too tired to continue pursuing Frieda and determines that he probably would not have much success anyway. He decides to try to find Erlanger but accidentally stumbles into the room of Buergel instead, a secretary to an official named Friedrich. Though it is the middle of the night, Buergel invites K. to come in. He explains that he cannot fall asleep once he has been woken up usually and he finds that the only cure is conversation: if he is able to talk to someone he will sometimes fall asleep. K. sits down on the edge of the bed and struggles to keep himself awake while Buergel explains various intricacies of the secretary system, intricacies which are actually quite useful to K. if only he were conscious enough to realize it. Buergel explains nighttime interrogations are especially advantageous for the person being interrogated because the secretary is likely, for some reason, to be more sympathetic. He points out that one might object that nighttime interrogations should be forbidden, therefore, but such an objection fails to pay proper respect to the efficiency of the Castle's bureaucracies; the Castle, he explains, creates such an enormous amount of work that there is no way that secretaries could just completely take the nights off. Buergel then explains that nighttime meetings are nothing compared to meetings that, through complete chance, are held in the middle of the night. Indeed, such meetings are almost a thing of legend, but it is believed that if someone were to stumble into a secretary's room in the middle of the night, the secretary would be almost powerless to resist any request whatsoever. K. is only able to hear bits and pieces of this, and shows no signs of comprehension, however, and eventually dozes off completely. He is awoken when Erlanger, who evidently is staying next door, and who bangs on the wall and bids him to come over.

K. wearily stumbles over to Erlanger's room, but the business is brief. Erlanger only wanted to meet with K. to convince him to have Frieda return to her post. It is not that Klamm was bothered by his absence, and the secretaries could hardly believe that such a thing could bother him, but they are zealous in their efforts to make sure that anything that could potentially be bothersome to anyone be completely absent from Klamm's life, so that there is no danger his important work might be disturbed. Erlanger leaves and K. lingers in the hallway, too tired to move. He watches the strange morning spectacle of distributing files to the occupants of the rooms in the corridor, all of whom are gentlemen of various levels of prestige. The men jealously fight over every file and the servants who distribute them are forced to use every imaginable ploy and threat in order to make sure a secretary does not get away with files that are not his. When the process is done, the gentlemen begin ringing their electric bells and the landlord finally shows up. He is furious with K., for he is not supposed to be in the corridor and has disrupted the morning routine of all of the residents. The landlady accompanies the two of them to the taproom. K. is fascinated by her dress and comments on it before falling asleep in a barrel.

Chapter XXIII and Chapter XXIV Analysis

What exactly one ought to make of Buergel's monologue is unclear, and the problem is only made more difficult by the fact that the book is incomplete. It is surely ironic that K., who the entire book has been focused solely on getting a meeting with Klamm, is unable to stay awake to receive the most useful advice so far. Indeed, there is some suggestion that if K. just sat up and asked for his favor to be granted, it would be done. (Though, it is not clear whether Buergel has sufficient authority to help K. out, though that question cannot be settled without knowing what exactly K. wants.) The fact that K. is still awake, even if only half-conscious, does leave the possibility open that K. understood what Buergel is saying but was just too tired to act on it at the moment. Perhaps Kafka was planning for K. to use Buergel's trick sometime in the future, but he does not have the opportunity to do so before the book ends.

Chapter XXV

Chapter XXV Summary

K. wakes up twelve hours later, still in the barrel. He awakes to find Pepi in the room. She is furious with him. She explains that she was once almost in love with them because she was so grateful for the opportunity to work in the taproom; she had resigned herself to the dreadful life of a chambermaid. However, she blames K. for the reversal of her fortune. Being a chambermaid is now so much worse because she has tasted what a better life is like. She is not surprised that Frieda left him, though, for she has always thought her to be a scheming woman. Pepi claims that Frieda loved all the attention she received for being Klamm's mistress but, when the attention started to wane with time, wanted to find a new trick to put her back in the public eye. Thus, she decided that she would leave the taproom—though only temporarily—to marry some man who seemed well below her. K. happened to be the perfect match for her plans and, thus, she eagerly left her post for him. The amount of time K. spent away from her gave her the liberty to pursue schemes of her own and keep tabs on how people talked about her. Finally, she decided to return to the taproom before people got used to Pepi.

K. agrees, more or less, with the facts as she has presented them, but completely rejects her interpretation. First, he does not think working in the taproom is really better than working as a chambermaid. As a chambermaid, all of one's time is spent among gentlemen. However, in the taproom, some of the lowest members of society come in, including such outcasts as K. himself. Moreover, there is no need, he claims, to ascribe such nasty intentions to Frieda. Frieda gave both of the opportunity to make more out of themselves and it is not her fault that they both squandered those opportunities.

Pepi dismisses K.'s more charitable assessment of Frieda as a vestige of his love for her. She asks him what he plans to do now that she has left him and offers him the opportunity to live with her and the rest of the chambermaids. She claims that he will be able to go many places he normally could not if they do so, with the suggestion that he will even be able to meet various gentlemen in the course of it. Before K. has the opportunity to accept, the inn's landlady comes in, irked, apparently, by his comment the previous night about her dress. Before arguing with the landlady, K. accepts Pepi's offer and then, turning to the landlady, begins to defend himself. She asks him how he gained so much expertise about clothes and he admits that he has none. Nonetheless, he claims that her clothes are unsuited for a landlady. In order to prove him wrong, though how it proves him wrong is unclear, she shows him an entire wardrobe of such dresses and tells her that she has two other wardrobes just like it upstairs.

After their argument, K. is approached by the coachman who offers him room and board at his house. K. asks why he would offer such a thing and the coachman tells him that he hopes to extract some favors on the basis of K.'s relationship with Erlanger. K. accepts his offer. The book then ends in mid-sentence.

Chapter XXV Analysis

The final chapter of this unfinished manuscript helps shed some light on the nature of K.'s ambition. His ambition, in some way, seems to be tied to his relationship with Frieda. Why exactly this should be so is not clear. There is, of course, the matter of her connection with Klamm, but it would seem that K.'s hopes need not hinge entirely on that, especially in light of the information he received from Buergel (which he may or may not be aware of). However, the reader should keep in mind that K. did not only value Frieda's connection with Klamm insofar as it might grant him an audience with the official, but because he could, somehow, use his relationship as a bargaining piece with Klamm. Once again, however, losing Frieda should not entirely extinguish his hopes, for as the landlady at Bridge Inn told him, Klamm is very generous to anyone who asks for something.

Characters

K.

K. arrives in town as a total stranger. He has been summoned as a land surveyor at the Castle's behest. For the most part, K.'s background is entirely unclear. It is not even clear whether K. really is a land surveyor, for he seems surprised when the Castle confirms that they have been expecting one; he takes it as a sign that he has, just then, been appointed land surveyor. K. never has an opportunity to show any kind of land surveying knowledge or skill—he is informed by the village chairman that his summoning was a bureaucratic error. He does claim, however, to have some medical experience, and it is on that pretext that he arranges the meeting with Hans' mother.

K.'s status as a stranger brings with it both problems and advantages. No one in the village really trusts him. He is constantly suspected, even from the first scene in the book when Schwarzer calls the Castle to confirm K.'s claim to be a land surveyor. Many people just want to avoid him, like the Lassemans who only allow him in their house for a few minutes before shooing him off. However, he does take advantage of the upside of being an outcast: since he is not part of the community, he is not subject to the social censures which seem to be the dominant force behind the town's various rules and regulations. Thus, for example, he does not care whether he is seen with Barnabas' family, even though they are despised by everyone else. That fact that he is, in a certain sense, above the law is what enables him to so boldly pursue a meeting with Klamm. He does not care whether he breaks any number of customs—and he does so frequently—in order to obtain what he wants.

Almost all of K.'s actions in the story are motivated by his desire to see Klamm, though his purpose is never made clear. This single-mindedness makes him seem very manipulative and unsympathetic at times. For example, when Frieda accuses him of being with her only because of her connection with Klamm, he does not dispute it. He only says that, if that is the case, it should not make her unhappy, because she is still with a man that she loves.

Frieda

Frieda is the daughter of the landlady at Bridge Inn, the head of the taproom at the Gentlemen's Inn, and Klamm's mistress. K. first meets her when he accompanies Olga to the Gentlemen's Inn to get some beer. Intrigued by her relationship with Klamm, K. woos her and they wind up having sex on the taproom floor. She leaves Klamm for him and they wind up living together in the schoolhouse where K. gets a job as janitor. They plan to get married the day after they first meet—a fact which makes the landlady very unhappy—but Frieda calls off the wedding after K. spends hours talking to Olga. She then returns to the Gentlemen's Inn to work in the taproom and winds up in a relationship with one of K.'s assistants, Jeremias.

Frieda's intentions and personality are unclear. As K. sees it, Frieda is a more or less honest person who left Klamm because she truly loved him. She seems to be a somewhat insecure person and fears whether K. wants to be with her because he actually loves her or just because she could someday be useful to him when he negotiates with Klamm. She winds up leaving him, K. believes, because she misunderstood what he was doing with Olga and because she was fed lies by Jeremias who hated K. ever since he was released from service.

Pepi, however, has a different account. According to her, Frieda is cold and manipulative throughout. She loved the attention she received as being Klamm's mistress but, as it began to fade, had to find a new way to put herself back into the public eye. She, therefore, decided that she would temporarily leave Klamm for some much lesser man and K. happened to appear at just the right time. She never had any real intention to stay with K., for all she cared about was social status, and K. could not impart any to her. Therefore, she left K. before she could be forgotten at the Gentlemen's Inn or by Klamm.

Artur and Jeremias

Artur and Jeremias are K.'s assistants. They both an identical appearance—young men with very dark beards—and their desire to help K. is almost aggressive. They constantly surround him and watch him, eager to carry out (usually poorly) whatever desire he makes. K. winds up sending them off and Jeremias convinces Frieda to leave K. for him.

Barnabas

Barnabas is the youngest in his family. He is the messenger between K. and Klamm.

Klamm

Klamm is a Castle official. Little is known about him and K. only sees him once, through a peephole. K.'s singular ambition in the story is to meet Klamm and extract favors from him.

Olga

Olga is the sister of Barnabas and Amalia. According to Amalia, she is in love with K., but he is not at all attracted to her.

Amalia

Amalia is Olga's younger sister. She earned the family its poor reputation by mistreating the messenger of one of the Castle officials.

The Landlady of Bridge Inn

The Landlady of Bridge Inn is Frieda's mother. She does not like K. and suspects his intentions in marrying her daughter.

The Village Chairman

K. meets with the village chairman in accordance with the first letter he receives from Klamm. The chairman tells him that the summon he received from the Castle was an error. He winds up getting him a position as janitor at the schoolhouse.

Pepi

Pepi is a chambermaid at the Gentlemen's Inn who winds up becoming head of the taproom when Frieda leaves. Upon Frieda's return, she is forced to become a chambermaid again. At the end of the story, K. agrees to live with Pepi and her fellow chambermaids.

Erlanger

Erlanger is one of Klamm's secretaries. He summons K. to tell him to convince Frieda to return to her post in the taproom.

Buergel

Buergel is the secretary of a Castle official named Friedrich. While K. dozes, he tells him how one can most effectively extract favors from officials.

Objects/Places

The Castle

The Castle is the center of government for the town, but is inaccessible to most people, including K. K. notes that the structure is actually unimpressive and shows quite a bit of wear.

The Village

Surrounding the Castle is a village where the common people live. It seems as if the village is almost unlimited in size and K. travels around only a very small section.

The Bridge Inn

The Bridge Inn is where K. first arrives. It is operated by the landlady, Frieda's mother.

Lasseman's House

When K. is attempting to climb up to the Castle, he is so wearied by the snow that he stops in at the house of Lasseman, a master tanner. The inhabitants know him by reputation but are eager to get rid of him.

K.'s Room at the Bridge Inn

K. is given a dingy room in the attic of the Bridge Inn.

Barnabas' House

K. goes several times to Barnabas's house. His last trip last so long that Frieda suspects him of infidelity and leaves him. (At least, that is what K. believes; Pepi has a different explanation.)

The Gentlemen's Inn

The Gentlemen's Inn is where officials and their various servants and secretaries stay when they have to leave the Castle. It is forbidden for anyone else to stay there.

The Taproom at the Gentlemen's Inn

Frieda works in the Gentlemen's Inn's taproom but winds up leaving her position to be with K. Pepi is her replacement until she returns a few days later.

The Schoolhouse

K. takes a job as janitor of the schoolhouse. He lives with Frieda and his two servants in the gymnasium.

The Corridor at the Gentlemen's Inn

K. gets in trouble for lingering in the corridor at the Gentlemen's Inn and watching files be delivered to the various gentlemen who are staying there.

Themes

K.'s Single Ambition

Throughout most of the book, K.'s single ambition is to meet with Klamm. What K. desires from this meeting is not entirely clear, though he does mention two things that he plans to do. First, he seems to want to smooth over any problems that his relationship with Frieda—Klamm's former mistress—must have caused or might cause in the future. K., however, is constantly told that there is no need to do this because Klamm, an exalted Castle official, could not possibly care what a stranger like K. does. Frieda later repeats her mother's accusation that K. hopes to use Frieda as a kind of bargaining chip with Klamm; K., for example, might give her back to Klamm in exchange for money or a job. K. neither confirms or denies this accusation, which might indicate that such was indeed his intention. This interpretation is strengthened by the final chapter of the book. K.'s ambition seems to dramatically wane, as if without Frieda he has no hope of reaching Klamm. He tells Pepi that Frieda opened up a chance for him to prove himself in a "higher position" (p. 309). This suggests that the opportunity has passed and that he can no longer entertain any reasonable hope of success.

K.'s second stated reason for meeting with Klamm is inspired by a conversation with the landlady at Bridge Inn. She, like her daughter, was Klamm's mistress and reveals how one obtains gifts from him: Just ask. She says that Klamm is not the type to be spontaneously generous, but whenever she saw something lying around, she asked for it and he always gave it to her. This becomes a secondary goal for K. and he mentions that, when he meets with Klamm, he will try to ask for a few things if the conversation allows for it.

The Absurd Bureaucracy

One the funniest and strangest parts of the book is the ridiculously massive bureaucratic structure which seems to dominate life in the village. Exact sizes are never given—such would violate the dream-like quality of Kafka's writing—but one has the impression that the Castle is filled to the brim with all kinds of officials who are constantly sifting through bottomless mounds of paperwork. In addition to all of the officials—who are almost like gods in the eyes of the villagers—there is an entire army of secretaries, servants, and messengers. K. is never able to meet any of the officials—though he desperately wants to meet Klamm—but he does meet with Momus and Erlanger, two of Klamm's secretaries. He also meets Buergel, the secretary of an official named Friedrich.

Everyone connected with the Castle's bureaucracy insists that it is completely inefficient and nearly infallible. There is, however, ample reason to doubt this. For one, K. himself is a victim of an administrative error. He was summoned as a land surveyor but, as it turned out, there was no need for a land surveyor. Indeed, the village chairman says it is

quite obvious that there is no such need for a land surveyor. It seems that bureaucrats simply caught wind of some need for a land surveyor and never stopped to question whether it made sense to summon one.

K.'s most direct experience with the Castle is through Barnabas, a messenger. K.'s only official means of communicating with the Castle is through messages, but the responses he get never have anything do with the messages he sent or what he is doing. For example, even after he has been told that the village has no need for a land surveyor, he receives a letter signed by Klamm praising him his diligent work surveying the land, despite the fact that he has done no such work. He later learns from Olga that when Barnabas gets a letter, one of the clerks just grabs, at random, a letter from a stack of old mail.

The Freedom of the Stranger

K.'s status as a stranger to the town brings with it many difficulties, but he gradually discovers that it also gives him a certain amount of freedom. In the town, law does not seem to ever be enforced with the typical forms of punishment, like imprisonment or death. Instead, the entire social order seems to depend upon a fear of being made an outcast. Barnabas' family suffers this punishment when Amalia scorns Sortini's messenger: The father loses his job and they become reviled by everyone else in the community.

K., however, is immune to all of this. He does not care what the community thinks about him, and this makes him a danger to the social order. People scoff at his bold determination to talk with Klamm. Hardly any villagers are able to see or talk to Klamm; not even Frieda, his mistress, ever talked to him, she says. It is interesting how the landlady's tone changes when he shows no sign of backing down from his goal. She seems to be almost scared that he really will do it and there is the suggestion that visiting Klamm might actually be painful for Klamm, not K. What exactly this danger might consist of is unclear, but there are a few good possibilities. For one, Klamm might be frightened to talk to K. because K. would not be restrained by any of the normal regulations. He could freely ask or say anything and Klamm would have no protection. Second, it might be that K. would undermine the almost godlike status of the officials. Everyone in the town adores the Castle and it seems that K. alone is able to see that it is actually dilapidated and ugly. The same might happen with Klamm and then the authority of the Castle—which is the foundation for the entire society—would be gone.

Style

Point of View

The book is narrated from the third-person perspective, but the narrative focuses entirely on K. His thoughts, for example, are the only thoughts which are ever made explicit to the reader. The narrator never interjects himself into the story and does not appear to have any more knowledge of the town's quirks than K. does. One must always ask why an author chooses a given perspective, and in this case it seems that Kafka wanted a certain amount of distance between K. and the reader. K.'s intentions are purposefully obscure. When Frieda repeats her mother's fear that K. is just using her for her connection to Klamm, K. neither confirms or denies what Frieda says, but simply tells her that she should be happy to be with a man that she loves. The reader knows no more of K.'s motives than Frieda does, though one might suspect (as Frieda, perhaps, does) that the landlady was right all along. Why Kafka wanted this obscurity surround his main character is a question that probably cannot be answered given the incomplete nature of the book. Perhaps K. would eventually reveal his true intentions when he gets to meet Klamm and everything would be made clear. Alternatively, perhaps K. would give up on meeting Klamm and what he wanted would remain mysterious.

Setting

The book is set in an anonymous town. It seems to be somewhere in Europe—perhaps Germany—because at one point K. mentions the possibility of moving to somewhere else in Europe, like France. This single sentence is the only thing which places the novel even in the real world, though there is probably no significance to it. For all intents and purposes, the novel's setting is a complete fantasy and any attempts to exactly situate it geographically would be contrary to the often surreal spirit of the work. It is also somewhat difficult to place the story into a specific time period. There is the occasional talk of automobiles and fire engines, which suggests that the story takes place around the time of its writing, namely the early twentieth century. At the same time, however, the organization of the community follows the pattern of feudalism: a large population of villagers clustered around the Count's castle. It might be argued, perhaps, that the feudal undertones are meant to liken the modern dependence on big government (represented by the absurd Castle bureaucracy) to the dependence of peasants upon their lords in the Middle Ages.

As has been mentioned, the center of the community is the Castle, though the exact function of the Castle is purposefully never revealed. By obscuring that fact, the Castle's functions are meant to be assumed to superfluous and the occasional insight into the workings of the bureaucracy only confirms that. Inside the Castle, one imagines, are countless officials, secretaries, and servants who are sifting through endless mounds of reports, depositions, and calculations for a purpose which is not even clear to them.

Language and Meaning

Kafka's writing style, even on the level of the sentence, is very unconventional and peculiar. The reader will notice that Kafka makes frequent use of so-called run-on sentences. For example, on page 128 he writes: "Still, there wasn't a moment's peace, the schoolmistress was already scolding him because there was no fresh water in the washbasin—K. had just been thinking of bringing over the washbasin for Frieda and himself, but he abandoned the thought for now, so as not to needlessly annoy the schoolmistress, but the sacrifice was futile, for just then there was a loud crash, unfortunately they had forgotten to clear the remnants of the evening meal from the teacher's desk, the schoolmistress removed all of it with the rule, everything was sent flying to the floor . . ." The sentence extends significantly beyond the quoted portion, but it should be enough to demonstrate Kafka's often confused style of writing which seems to be mainly distinguished by his unconventional use of punctuation. He uses commas to separate independent clauses which is not, technically speaking, grammatical. A writer, of course, is free to take whatever liberties he pleases, and one should surely not accuse Kafka of not understanding the mechanics of his language. Rather, the effect intended by this style is to make the text flowing and rhythmic, in which thoughts merge gradually with one another. The effect would be destroyed by the full-stop of a period.

Structure

The book is divided into twenty-five chapters. The reader should be aware before starting that this is an unfinished manuscript. Kafka gave up on the work a few years before he died. This fact is abundantly clear at the end of the book, when the story ends in the middle of a sentence. There are relatively minor signs like, for example, the fact that some chapters (XVI and XXI-XXV) are untitled but also there are a number of storylines which were obviously meant to be developed at greater length but which Kafka never got around to. For example, K.'s plan to meet Hans's mother is never brought up again after they first formulate it. Likewise, K. never has a chance to exploit the bureaucracy's weakness that Buergel exposed to him (if K. even heard it). Of course, above all, K.'s whole quest to meet with Klamm is never definitively settled one way or the other.

Chapter XXV, the last chapter in the book, is in a very rough condition. At times, it seems to resemble notes more than a story. Kafka usually lets his characters' dialogue speak for itself, but when Pepi tells Kafka what she thinks of Frieda, it is done through the voice of the narrator. Moreover, this explanation is exceptionally long. Certainly, Kafka uses long paragraphs throughout the book, but nothing that compares to the enormous nineteen-page paragraph which opens (and nearly closes) the chapter. The existing fragment of Chapter XV is already longer than any other chapter in the book which suggests, perhaps, that Kafka had planned to divide it into two or more chapters after he finished writing it.

Quotes

"Keeping his eyes fixed upon the Castle, K. went ahead, nothing else mattered to him. But as he came closer he was disappointed in the Castle, it was only a rather miserable little tower pieced together from village houses, distinctive only because everything was perhaps built out of stone, but the paint had long since flaked off, and the stone seemed to be crumbling." p. 8

"'Surely you aren't afraid—those who are ignorant naturally consider everything possible'—here K. opened the door—'surely you aren't afraid for Klamm's sake?' The landlady looked after him in silence as he hurried down the stairs followed by the assistants." p. 56

"'No,' said the chairman, seizing one phrase, 'those telephone answers are of "real significance," how could it be otherwise? How could the information supplied by a Castle official be meaningless? I said so already in relation to Klamm's letter. All these statements have no official meaning; if you attach official meaning to them, you're quite mistaken, though their private meaning as expressions of friendship or hostility is very great, usually greater than any official meaning could ever be.'" p. 73

"it seemed to K. as if they had broken off all contact with him, but as if he were freer than ever and could wait as long as he wanted here in this place where he was generally not allowed, and as if he had fought for this freedom for himself in a manner nobody else could have done and as if nobody could touch him or drive him away, or even speak to him, yet—and this conviction was at least equally strong—as if there were nothing more senseless, nothing more desperate, than this freedom, this waiting, this invulnerability." p. 106

"'Certainly, Klamm will never speak to anyone he doesn't want to speak to, no matter how strenuously a certain individual exerts himself and no matter how insufferably he pushes himself to the fore, but this fact alone, that Klamm will never speak to him, will never allow him to come face to face with him, is already quite enough, for in reality why shouldn't he be capable of enduring the sight of anybody whomsoever. This cannot be proved, for it'll never come to a test.'" p. 109

"Awakened at night by some noise, K. first groped about drowsily for Frieda before noticing that it was not Frieda who lay beside him but one of the assistants. No doubt because of his irritation on being suddenly awakened, this came as the greatest shock he had experienced in the village up to now. With a shout he half rose, and without sopping to think, struck the assistant so hard with his fist that he began to cry." p. 127

"'Everything,' said K., who, in becoming accustomed to the reproach, had pulled himself together, 'everything you say is in a sense right, it is not wrong, only it is hostile. Those are the landlady's thoughts, those of my enemy, even if you think they're your own, which I find reassuring. But they are instructive, the landlady is still capable of teaching one a thing or two. She didn't tell me this directly, though she certainly hasn't spared me

in other ways, she obviously entrusted this weapon to you in hopes that you would make use of it at a particularly bad or decisive hour; if I mistreat you, then she mistreats you in the same way. But Frieda, just think: Even if everything was exactly as the landlady says, that would be terrible only in one case, namely, if you're not fond of me. . . .'" p. 158

"Because of Schwarzer the full attention of the authorities had focused on K. right away in that first hour, rather absurdly so, for he was then a complete stranger in the village, without acquaintances, without a refuge, exhausted after the long walk, lying utterly helpless on the straw mattress, at the mercy of each official intervention. Had it only been one night later, everything would have happened differently, smoothly, virtually out of sight." p. 165

"'And where in all this do you see the influence of the Castle?' K. asked. 'It doesn't seem to have intervened yet. What you have told me up to now is nothing more than the mindless timidity of the people, their delight in someone else's plight, their fickleness in friendship, exactly the story of thing one finds everywhere . . .' 'No , no,' said Olga, 'nobody should be blamed for this, nobody could behave any different, it was all due to the influence of the Castle.'" p. 205

"'You must distinguish between the two of us,' said Olga, 'those two letters made Barnabas a happy child again, despite all his doubts about his task. He confesses these doubts only to himself and to me, but he wants to find honor in your eyes by acting like a real messenger, the way he thinks real messenger act. . . '" p. 229

"'In spite of everything,' said K, 'I don't regret having driven the assistants from my service. If the relationship was as you describe it, in other words, if your faithfulness depended solely on the professional commitment of the assistants, then it was good that all this came to an end. The happiness of that marriage in between those two predators, who backed down only under the threat of a whipping, would not have been that great. So I too am grateful to that family, which inadvertently played a role in separating us.'" p. 250

"'You yourself do recognize Frieda's good qualities, only you're interpreting everything incorrectly, you think she's simply using all of this for her own purposes and to some evil end, or even as a weapon against you. No, Pepi, even if she had arrows like that, she could not shoot them at such close range. And selfish? One could rather say that by sacrificing the things she already owned and the things she might have expected to gain she gave the two of us the change to prove ourselves in a higher position, but we have disappointed her, and we're even forcing her to come back. . . .'" p. 309

Topics for Discussion

The reader learns later in the book that the telephone system is really just a diversion for the Castle officials and one never actually talks to who they want to. What, then, is the significance, if any, of the phone calls K. and others make?

Should K. doubt Barnabas's stories about the Castle?

Why does Amalia dislike the fact that Barnabas is messenger?

In what way do Amalia's and Kafka's attitudes towards the community agree or disagree?

Does K. understand what Buergel is saying to him?

Whose interpretation of Frieda is correct—Kafka's or Pepi's?

Why does K. immediately agree to stay with the coachman after already accepting Pepi's offer to stay with her and the chambermaids?