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Translated and Edited by

STANLEY CORNGOLD
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

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Contents

1. The second of these four stories, "A Little Woman," is not included in this edition.

stead looked only at the stone. In fact, the man did get ready to write further, but he could not go on, there was some obstacle, he let his pencil sink and again turned toward K. Now K. also looked at the artist and noticed that the latter was deeply embarrassed[1] but could not say why. All his former vigor had disappeared. As a result K. also grew embarrassed; they exchanged helpless looks; there was a terrible misunderstanding, which neither of them could clear up. At just the wrong time a little bell in the cemetery chapel began to peal, but the artist gestured with his raised hand, and the bell stopped. After a little while it began again; this time quite softly and without anyone's special request, immediately stopping; it was as if it had only wanted to test its sound. K. was disconsolate at the artist's predicament, he began to weep and for a long time sobbed into his hands held to his face. The artist waited until K. had calmed down and then, since he saw no other way out, decided to continue writing. The first little stroke he made was a vast relief for K., but the artist evidently produced it only with the greatest reluctance; the script was also no longer so beautiful, above all it seemed to be lacking in gold; the line dragged on, pale and uncertain: the letter merely became very large. It was a "J"; when it was almost finished, the artist stamped his foot furiously into the burial mound so that the earth flew into the air all around. Finally K. understood what the artist meant; there was no more time to apologize; he dug all his fingers into the ground, which offered practically no resistance; everything seemed prepared; for mere appearance's sake a thin crust of dirt had been set up; below it a deep hole with steep sides opened up, and into this, turned onto his back by a gentle current, K. sank. But while down below, his head still raised, he was already being received by the impenetrable depths, up above his name raced with mighty embellishments across the stone.

Enchanted by this sight, he awoke.

A Report to an Academy

Exalted Gentleman of the Academy!

You have granted me the honor of summoning me to submit to the Academy a report on my previous life as an ape.

Unfortunately I am unable to comply with the intent of your request. Almost five years separate me from apedom, a span of time that is short, perhaps, when measured on the calendar, but infi-

1. *In grosser Verlegenheit:* clearly a privileged expression for Kafka. The phrase appears in *In the Penal Colony* (p. 48) as well as at the outset of "A Country Doctor" (p. 60).

nitely long when galloped through in the way I have done, accompanied for stretches by excellent persons, advice, applause, and orchestral music but basically alone, since all my accompaniment kept its distance, to continue the metaphor, from the railing. This achievement would have been impossible had I wanted to cling obstinately to my origin, to the memories of my youth. In fact, to give up all such obstinacy was the supreme commandment that I had imposed on myself; I, a free ape, accepted this yoke. But as a result, for their part my memories have become more and more closed off from me. If at first my return—had the world of humans wanted it—was open to me through the entire gateway that the sky forms over the earth, at the same time it became ever lower and narrower under the lash that drove my evolution forward; I felt more comfortable and more fully enclosed in the human world; the storm that blew at my back from my past subsided; today it is only a draft that cools my heels; and the far-away gap, through which it comes and through which I once came, has grown so small that, if ever my strength and will were even adequate to run back to that point, I would have to scrape the hide from my body in order to pass through. To speak frankly, as much as I like to employ figurative images for these things, to speak frankly: Your apedom, gentlemen, to the extent that you have something of the sort behind you, cannot be more remote from you than mine is from me. But everyone who walks about here on earth feels a tickling in his heels: from the tiny chimpanzee to the great Achilles.

In the most limited sense, however, I may indeed be able to respond to your inquiry, and I do so with great pleasure. The first thing that I learned was to shake hands; the handshake signifies openness. Now, today, at the high point of my career, let frank speech be coupled with that first handshake. It will not contribute anything essentially new to the Academy and will fall far short of what you have asked of me and which, with the best will in the world, I cannot tell you—nonetheless, it should reveal the guideline a former ape has followed in penetrating the human world and establishing himself in it. Yet I certainly would not have been able to tell you even the trivial things that follow were I not entirely sure of myself and were my position on all the great vaudeville stages of the civilized world secure to the point of being impregnable.

I come from the Gold Coast. In describing how I was caught, I am dependent on the reports of others. A hunting expedition of the Hagenbeck company[1]—by the way, since that time I have emptied more than one good bottle of red wine with its leader—lay in wait

1. Carl Hagenbeck (1844–1923), a German animal dealer, was world famous in Kafka's time for his benevolent manner of encouraging the intelligence of the animals he caught and then trained. He pioneered the creation of open-air zoos.

in the bushes along the shore when, one evening, running with the pack, I went to drink. There was a shot; I was the only one hit; I was hit twice.

One shot in the cheek; it was slight; but it left a great hairless, red scar that has won me the name—coined, as it were, by a monkey—the repulsive, utterly inappropriate name of Red Peter, as if the only difference between me and that trained animal ape Peter, who had a minor reputation and who recently croaked, was a red mark on the cheek.[2] This by the by.

The second shot struck me below the hip. It was serious, and as a result I still walk with a slight limp. Recently I read an article by one of the ten thousand windbags who vent their views about me in the newspapers: they say that my ape nature has not yet been entirely repressed; the proof is supposed to be that whenever I have company, I am inclined to lower my pants to show the bullet's path of entry. Every tiny finger of that guy's writing hand ought to be blown off, one by one. I, I have the right to lower my pants in front of anyone I like; there is nothing to see there other than a well-groomed pelt and the scar left by a—let us choose here a specific word for a specific purpose, a word, however, that should not be misunderstood—the scar left by a profligate shot. Everything is open and above board; there is nothing to hide; where it is a question of truth, every large-minded person casts off the fanciest manners. If, on the other hand, that scribbler were to lower his pants whenever he has company, things, I assure you, would look very different, and I will let it stand as a sign of his good sense that he does not do so. But that being so, let him keep his delicate sensibility off my back!

After those shots I awoke—and here my own memory gradually takes over—in a cage in steerage of the Hagenbeck freighter. It was not a four-sided cage with bars; instead, only three barred sides were attached to a crate, which thus formed the fourth wall. The whole was too low for me to stand and too narrow to sit down. Hence I squatted with bent, continually trembling knees; and since at first I may not have wanted to see anyone and was eager only to remain in the dark, I faced the crate while the bars of the cage cut into the flesh of my backside. This way of keeping wild animals during the first few days of their captivity is considered effective; and today, with my experience, I cannot deny that from a human point of view this is, in fact, the case.

2. Kafka very likely knew of the vaudeville act titled "Peter, the Human Ape," which opened at the Ronacher Theater in Vienna in December 1908. Advertisements claimed that Peter acted "just like a human being, has better table manners than most people, and behaves so well that even more highly evolved creatures would do well to model themselves on him." He smoked, drank, ate on stage, pedaled a bicycle, and rode a horse.

At the time, however, I did not think about these matters. For the first time in my life I had no way out; at the very least, there was no moving forward; directly in front of me was the crate, board joined firmly to board. Admittedly, a continuous gap ran between the boards; upon my first discovery of the gap, I greeted it with the blissful howl of unreason; but this gap was not by a long shot big enough to stick even my tail through, and all an ape's might could not widen it.

Later I was told that I had made unusually little noise, from which the others concluded that either I would soon expire or that, should I succeed in surviving the first critical period, I would be eminently trainable. I survived this period. Glumly sobbing, painfully searching for fleas, wearily licking a coconut, knocking my skull against the wall of the crate, sticking out my tongue whenever someone came near me—these were the first occupations in my new life. In all that, however, still only one feeling: no way out. Naturally, today I can use human words only to sketch my apish feelings of the time, and so I misstate them; but even if I cannot arrive at the old apish truth, my recital at least leans in that direction, there can be no doubt.

I had had so many ways out before, and now I was left with none. I was stuck. If they had nailed me down, I would have had no less freedom of movement. Why was that? Scratch open the flesh between your toes, and you will not find the reason. Crush your backside against the bars of your cage until they almost cut you in two, and you still won't find the reason. I had no way out but had to provide myself with one, for I could not live without it. Always up against the wall of this crate—I would inevitably have croaked. But at Hagenbeck, apes belong up against the wall—well, so I stopped being an ape. A clear, beautiful thought that I must somehow have hatched with my belly, for apes think with their belly.

I am afraid that what I mean by "a way out" will not be clearly understood. I am using it in the most common and also the fullest sense of the word. I deliberately do not say "freedom." I do not mean that great feeling of freedom on all sides. Perhaps I knew it as an ape, and I have known human beings who long for it. But as far as I am concerned, I did not ask for freedom either then or now. By the way: human beings all too often deceive themselves about freedom. And just as freedom counts among the most sublime feelings, so too the corresponding delusion counts among the most sublime. Often, in the vaudeville theaters, before I go on, I have seen some artiste couple up at the ceiling fooling around on their trapezes. They swung, they rocked, they jumped, they floated into each other's arms; one carried the other by the hair with his teeth. "That, too, is human freedom," I would think, "high-handed movement."

You mockery of holy Nature! No building could stand up to apedom's laughter at such a sight.

No, it was not freedom I wanted. Just a way out; to the right, to the left, wherever; I made no other demands; even if the way out should only be a delusion; my demand was small, the delusion would not be greater. To move on, to move on! Anything but standing still with my arms raised, pressed flat against a crate wall.

Today I see it clearly: without the utmost inner calm I would never have been able to escape. And in fact, I may owe everything I have become to the calm that came over me after the first days on board ship. And this calm, in turn, I very likely owed to the ship's crew.

They are good men, despite everything. To this day I enjoy recalling the sound of their heavy strides that reverberated in my light sleep. They had the habit of going about things extremely slowly. If one of them wanted to rub his eyes, he would lift his hand like a weight on a pulley. Their jokes were crude but hearty. Their laughter was always mixed with a dangerous-sounding cough that did not, in fact, mean anything. They always had something in their mouth to spit out, and they didn't care where their spit landed. They were always complaining that my fleas jumped on them; and yet they were never seriously angry with me on that score; they were aware that fleas thrived in my pelt and that fleas are jumpers; they came to terms with this fact. When they were off duty, a number of them would sometimes sit in a semicircle around me; hardly speaking but merely making cooing sounds to each other; stretched out on crates and smoking their pipes; slapping their knees as soon as I made the slightest movement; and every so often one of them would take a stick and tickle me where I liked to be tickled. If I were invited today to take part in a cruise on this ship, I would certainly decline the invitation, but it is equally certain that, lying there in steerage, the memories I could indulge in would not all be ugly.

It was above all the calm I acquired within the circle of these people that held me back from any attempt to escape. Now, in retrospect, it seems to me as if I had at least suspected that I needed to find a way out if I wanted to stay alive, but that this way out was not to be attained by running away. I no longer know whether escape was possible, but I believe it was; it ought always to be possible for an ape to escape. With my teeth the way they are today, I have to be careful even at ordinary nutcracking; but at that time I could probably have managed eventually to bite through the door lock. I did not do it. What good would it have done me anyway? The minute I stuck out my head, they would have caught me and locked me up in an even worse cage; or I might have been able to slip away unnoticed to the other animals—for example, to the giant snakes opposite—and in their embraces breathed my last; or I might even have been successful in stealing my way to the upper deck and jumping overboard, and then I would have rocked for a little while on the great ocean before drowning. Desperate deeds. I did not calculate in such a human way, but under the influence of my environment I behaved as if I had calculated.

I did not calculate; but I did observe matters with great calm. I saw these men walk back and forth, always the same faces, the same movements: it often seemed to me that only one man was involved. So, this man or these men went unmolested. An exalted goal dawned on me. No one promised me that if I became like them, the cage door would be raised. Promises of that kind, for seemingly impossible fulfillment, are not given. But if fulfillment is achieved, the promises also appear subsequently, just where they had earlier been sought in vain. Now, in themselves these men had nothing that especially appealed to me. If I were a devotee of the above-mentioned freedom, I would certainly have preferred the great ocean to the way out that showed itself to me in the dull gaze of these men. In any case, I observed them for a long time before I thought about such things; in fact, it was the accumulation of observations that first urged me in this definite direction.

It was so easy to imitate these people. Within a few days I had learned to spit. We then spat in one another's faces, the only difference being that afterward I licked my face clean and they did not. Before long I was smoking a pipe like an old hand, and when in addition I pressed my thumb into the bowl of the pipe, all of steerage cheered; it was only the difference between the empty pipe and the filled bowl that I could not grasp for a long time.

It was the brandy bottle that gave me the greatest trouble. The smell was torture for me; I forced myself with all my might; but weeks went by before I overcame my revulsion. Curiously, the men took these inner struggles more seriously than anything else about me. In my recollections, too, I cannot tell these people apart, but there was one of them who came again and again, alone or with his comrades, by day, by night, at all hours; set himself down in front of me with the bottle and gave me lessons. He could not make head or tail of me: he wanted to solve the riddle of my being. He slowly uncorked the bottle and then looked at me to see if I had understood; I confess, I always watched him with wild, hectic attention; no human teacher will find such a human student in the whole wide world; after the bottle was uncorked, he raised it to his mouth; my glances follow him down into his gullet; he nods, satisfied with me, and puts the bottle to his lips; I, ecstatic with gradually dawning understanding, squealing, scratch the length and the breadth of me, wherever my hand lands; he is pleased, puts the bot-

tle to his mouth, and takes a swig; I, impatient and desperate to emulate him, soil myself in my cage, an act that once again gives him great satisfaction; and now, holding the bottle at arm's length and with a swoop bringing it back up again, he leans back with exaggerated pedantry and in one gulp empties it. Exhausted from excessive desire, I can follow no longer and hang weakly onto the bars while he ends the theoretical instruction by rubbing his belly and grinning.

Only now does the practical exercise begin. Hasn't the theoretical teaching exhausted me too much? Very likely I'm far too exhausted. That is part of my fate. Nonetheless, I reach as well as I can for the bottle that is held out to me; trembling, uncork it; with this success my strength gradually returns. Already barely different from my model, I lift the bottle, put it to my lips, and—and with revulsion, with revulsion, even though it is empty and filled only with the smell—throw it on the ground with disgust. To the sadness of my teacher, to my own greater sadness; nor do I make things better either with him or myself when, even after throwing away the bottle, I do not forget to rub my belly brilliantly and grin.

All too often the lesson went this way. And to my teacher's credit, he was not angry with me; true, sometimes he held his burning pipe against my fur until it began to glow at some spot I could reach only with difficulty, but then he would extinguish it himself with his huge, kindly hand; he was not angry with me, he understood that we were on the same side, fighting my ape nature, and that my job was the more difficult one.

What a victory, then, for him as for me, when one evening, before a large group of spectators—perhaps a party was underway, a phonograph was playing, an officer was strolling among the men—when, on this evening, when no one was looking, I grabbed a bottle of brandy that had accidentally been left outside my cage, amid the increasing attention of the company uncorked it very correctly, put it to my lips, and without dawdling, without grimacing, like a professional tippler, with round, rolling eyes and swashing throat, really and truly drank down the entire contents; tossed away the bottle, no longer like someone in despair but like an artist; I did forget to rub my belly; but in return, because I could not help it, because I felt the urge, because all my senses were in an uproar, in short, I shouted "Hello!," broke out in human speech, with this cry leaped into the human community and felt its echo, "Just listen to that, he's talking!" like a kiss on my whole sweat-soaked body.

I repeat: I was not attracted to the idea of imitating men; I imitated because I was looking for a way out, for no other reason. Besides, I accomplished little with this victory. My voice failed again immediately; it returned only after several months; my disgust with the brandy bottle returned, even stronger. But my course was irrevocably set.

When I was handed over to my first trainer, in Hamburg, I quickly recognized the two choices available to me: the zoo or vaudeville. I did not hesitate. I said to myself: try with all your might to get into vaudeville; that is the way out; the zoo is only a new cage with bars; once you get into it, you're lost.

And, gentlemen, I learned. Oh, you learn when you have to; you learn when you want a way out; you learn relentlessly. You supervise yourself, whip in hand; you tear yourself to pieces at the least sign of resistance. Ape nature, falling all over itself, raced[3] madly out of me and away, so that I practically made a monkey of my first teacher, who was soon forced to give up training and had to be delivered to a sanatorium. Fortunately he was soon released.

But I used up many teachers, indeed, even several teachers simultaneously. When I had become more confident of my abilities and the public world followed my progress, I had glimmerings of a future; I myself hired teachers, seated them in five adjoining rooms, and managed to study with them all at the same time by leaping incessantly from one room to the other.

This progress! This penetration of rays of knowledge from all sides into the awakening brain! I do not deny it: it made me happy. But I also admit: I did not overestimate it, not then, even less today. Through an effort that has hitherto never been repeated on this planet, I have reached the average cultural level of a European. That by itself may be nothing at all, but it is something to the extent that it helped me out of the cage and gave me this particular way out, this human way out. There is an excellent German expression, "to slip off into the bushes":[4] that is what I did, I slipped off into the bushes. I had no other way, presupposing that freedom was never an option.

When I review my evolution and its goal so far, I can't complain, but neither am I satisfied. My hands in my pants pockets, the wine bottle on the table, I half-lie, half-sit in my rocking chair and look out the window. When company comes, I play host as is proper. My manager sits in the anteroom; when I ring, he comes and listens to what I have to say. In the evenings there is almost always a performance, and I enjoy successes that can scarcely be surpassed. If I return late at night from banquets, from learned societies, from convivial occasions, a little half-trained chimpanzee is waiting for me, and I have my pleasure of her in the way of all apes. In the daytime I do not want to see her; she has the lunatic look of the bewil-

3. The German verb *rasen* means both to "race" and to "rave."
4. The German expression *sich in die Büsche schlagen*, means, literally, "to smash a path (sideways) through the brush or bushes" and hence retains the jungle image.

dered trained animal; I am the only one who recognizes it, and I can't stand it.

By and large, I have achieved what I wanted to achieve. Let no one say that it hasn't been worth it. For the rest, I do not seek the judgment of any man, I merely want to disseminate knowledge; I am merely making a report; to you, too, exalted gentlemen of the Academy, I have merely made a report.

A STARVATION ARTIST • FOUR STORIES

First Distress

A trapeze artist—it is generally acknowledged that this art form, practiced high in the cupolas of the great variety theaters, is one of the most difficult of those attainable by human beings—had so organized his life, at first only from striving for perfection but later from the growing tyranny of habit as well, that as long as he was employed at the same place, he spent night and day on his trapeze. All his needs, which were actually very modest, were provided for by orderlies, who took turns keeping watch below and using specially constructed containers to hoist up and down whatever was needed above. This way of life caused no special difficulties for those around him; it was merely somewhat distracting that during the other numbers on the program he remained floating above, which could not be hidden from sight, and although he mainly kept still at such times, now and again a glance from the public would stray up to him. But the directors forgave him, because he was an extraordinary, an irreplaceable artist. It was, of course, also understood that he lived this way not out of wilfullness and that this was the only way he could keep himself continually in form, the only way he could keep his art at the level of perfection.

Certainly it was also healthy up above, and when during the warmer months the side windows were opened all around the vaulted ceiling and along with the fresh air the sun powerfully penetrated the dusky arena, it was even beautiful. Of course his interactions with others were limited: sometimes an acrobat colleague of his would climb up to him on the rope ladder, and both of them would sit on the trapeze, chatting while bracing themselves to the right and left on the ropes; at other times maintenance men, fixing the roof, might exchange a few words with him through an open window; or the fire inspector, checking the emergency lighting on the topmost balcony, would call out a few respectful though virtually unintelligible words. Otherwise the quiet all around him was unbroken; now and then a worker who might have wandered one afternoon into the empty theater would look up thoughtfully into heights the eye could barely make out, where the trapeze artist, who could not know that someone was watching him, was practicing his skills or resting.

The trapeze artist could have lived happily this way had it not been for the unavoidable journeys from town to town; these placed a great burden on him. To be sure, the manager took pains to spare the trapeze artist any unnecessary prolongation of his suffering; they used racing cars for traveling in the cities, and whenever possible they ran at top speed through the deserted streets at night or in the earliest morning hours, but of course this was too slow for the yearning of the trapeze artist; a whole train compartment was reserved for him, where he spent the trip lying up in the netting of the baggage rack—certainly a miserable substitute for his customary way of life, but at least some sort of approximation; in the next town on the tour, the trapeze was in its place long before the trapeze artist arrived at the theater; all the doors that led into the performance space were thrown wide open, all the corridors kept free—but the happiest moments in the manager's life always occurred whenever the trapeze artist set his foot on the rope ladder and in a flash, at last, was once again hanging up above from his trapeze.

No matter how many trips the manager had successfully managed by now, each new one was still an ordeal, since, aside from everything else, the tours always damaged the trapeze artist's nerves.

And so one day the two of them were once again traveling together; the trapeze artist lay in the baggage rack dreaming, the manager was leaning back in the window seat opposite, reading a book, when the trapeze artist quietly spoke to him. The manager was immediately at his service. The trapeze artist, biting his lips, said that instead of the one trapeze he had used up until now, from now on he would need two trapezes for his acrobatics—two trapezes, one across from the other. The manager consented at once. But as if to show that in this case the manager's agreement carried as little weight as, say, his objection, the trapeze artist said that from now on he would never again and under no circumstances use only one trapeze in his act. At the thought that something of the sort might happen, he seemed to shudder. The manager, hesitant and watchful, once again declared his complete agreement that two trapezes were better than one and that the new arrangement would have the advantage of adding more variety to the performance. At that the trapeze artist suddenly burst into tears. Deeply shaken, the