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Posted on 03 October 2019 By Franz Kafka

Around me things sink away like fallen snow, whereas for other people even a little liqueur glass stands on the table steady as a statue 4.5 stars. There are stories in this collection and these were by far my favorite kind that clutch and fumble and scrabble across the surface of your mind, entities so eerily misshapen and askew that you don't want to let them in. Grimacing and winking, they slither in anyway. Before you know it, everything you thought solid and real begins to fall away. Reality recedes with a measured, merciless tread. Its deliberate pace only intensifies your sense of dread. You feel horribly lost and unnerved, yet the world continues to retreat, indifferent to your mounting distress. Your cries are in vain. It does not falter. You wind up adrift in a realm of blurred, hazy, surreal confusion. Left to fend for yourself, you experience a strangeness, sickness on land as you travel deeper into bizarre, uncertain terrain. You finally lose your bearings entirely. Disorientation swallows you whole. And then, just when you've given up hope that anything will ever make sense again, it hits you. Reality didn't leave you behind at all, it merely sloughed off the thin veneer of coherence we tend to obscure it with. Kafka dexterously peeled back this facade, stripping away our familiar, comforting lies and deceptions they're scattered pitifully over the floor, where their glaring inadequacy is impossible to deny. They are futile, meager, and ridiculous, and yet also heartbreakingly, endearingly human. Not only did Kafka reveal many of the ways we distort the world around us, he also had quite a bit of fun examining ways in which we contort

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our very selves We bend back on ourselves in our desperate attempts to force our baffling existence to have some sort of ultimate meaning We scuttle along deformed, wracked with denial and guilt, smiling vacantly, expectantly Far too frequently, these inner and outer contortions are also how we manage to fit in with our fellow human beings It occurred to me that perhaps my long body displeased him by making him feel too small And this thought although it was late at night and we had hardly met a soul tormented me so much that while walking I bent my back until my hands reached my knees Sometimes, in our efforts to connect with others, we are even forced to resort to hideous, painful contortions, such as steps or words Good god, he fucking gets it. The really brilliant thing about Kafka is that, often than not, after experiencing all this nightmarish absurdity, one ends up laughing right along with him at the underlying insanity of it all His mischievous agility, unpredictable playfulness, and delightfully skewed impressions tinge many of these tales with a surprising amount of satisfyingly dark humor And, after all, isn't a wicked sense of humor one of the best ways to deal with the exasperating inscrutability we often come up against in this crazy, mixed up world. Overall, reading Kafka kind of feels like taking a trip along a Möbius strip You seem to fade in and out of reality You start off walking on the floor, and then suddenly, you're certain you're lurching across the ceiling Möbius strips, however, are ingeniously twisted they actually only have one side Strictly speaking, there is no up or down, in or out So too with Kafka you feel off balance, bewildered and queasy by the crumpled deformities you encounter as you travel through a gnarled, grotesque landscape, but there's something strangely familiar underneath it all, something you can't quite put your finger on. Then you end up exactly where you began, and you finally understand your journey You realize that you haven't been going in and out of reality, but that reality has instead been presented in a disturbingly crooked, yet somehow far truthful, manner. Momentarily freed from your habitual defenses, you catch a glimpse of the elusive face of the world as it is Welcome home. Buy a good collection of Kafka's stories and put it in the bathroom Really. If you've been led to believe that Kafka wrote drab stories about alienation and angst and that The Metamorphosis is a tragedy, then take a magic marker,

Delta of Venus

Metamorphoses

Lady Chatterley's Lover

Kushiel's Dart

Sappho's Leap

Claudius the God and
His Wife Messalina

A Princess of Mars

The English Patient

Robert Mapplethorpe
and the Classical
Tradition

Tropic of Cancer

The Piano Teacher

I, Claudius

Sex and the City

The Nude: A Study in
Ideal Form

Thy Neighbor's Wife

cross out the name on the spine, and pretend it's a weird book by Dave Sedaris or something. Kafka's stories are smart, often funny, quick to read, and as modern and relevant as ever. In the bathroom you'll probably bypass the larger works including *The Metamorphosis* and discover his short stories. We call it flash fiction now: stories under a few hundred words and packing a poem-like punch into their lean frames. Kafka was a master of the form, but they are too short to use as an essay subject in high school, so too many people don't read them. When you've adjusted to Kafka as an absurdist who actually likes people, then re-read *The Metamorphosis* and finish it this time: it ends on an up note, much to most people's surprise and strike out into *The Hunger Artist*, *The Penal Colony*, and the rest. Treat this as a collection of fun, short, absurd, witty stories and forget everything your high school English teacher told you. He or she hadn't actually read Kafka in decades, after all. I think it's a little mistake to judge Kafka considering only *The Metamorphosis*. There's a whole different view on things in some of his stories. You're not going to find a nice, warm, fuzzy, Care Bear kind of book that line made sense in my mind. But some of his stories do show another side of him. I personally like the psychological, twisted, complicated, claustrophobic and absurd ones with a weird sense of humor; yes, he can be funny and infinite interpretations. But that's just me. I liked most of his stories, a few names come to mind. I don't know why and in no specific order: *A Hunger Artist*, a disturbing yet beautiful story about an alienated artist; *In the Penal Colony*; *Eleven Sons* and its poetic descriptions; *A Dream* loved its disquieting atmosphere; *That Making Sense*; *The Great Wall of China*; *A Report to an Academy*; *Fresh Air*; *The Problem of Our Laws* that gives you a feeling of despair, because you find yourself being governed by people noble people you'll never meet with their rules that you're not supposed to understand; *A Fratricide* kind of shocked me; *The Cares of a Family Man*, short stories like that leave you thinking about what the heck he was writing about. Kafka is a complicated writer, that's true. But the difficult ones often help you to see ordinary things from another perspective. And yes, that's not always sunshine and rainbows, but that's the other inevitable side of life. He mostly described awful, absurd, stressful, weird and confusing situations that human beings

Atomised

Les Liaisons
dangereuses

The Naked Woman: A
Study of the Female
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Justine, Philosophy in
the Bedroom, and Other
Writings

experience on daily basis Sadly, I can relate to his labyrinths of endless bureaucracy A lot. This writer is not for everyone And there s nothing wrong with that In my humble opinion, he was a man who was able to write, among many other things, something like Before the Law a parable that appears in one of my favorites novels such a familiar feeling So my connection with him was instantaneous It s a shame that mostly happens with people that died a couple or hundreds of years ago No Lake House around here, huh God, I hated that movie Anyway, Before the Law is a short and great example of one of the many sides a Kafkaesque universe has. Feb 23, 14 Also on my blog. The Old Man in the Woods Or The Monkeys by fire We monkeys have sat by this ever burning fire for generations because we are afraid to go outside the perimeter of its light into the dark Although we have tried to look beyond into the darkness everyday hoping to find something yet all of us are afraid to step out And this fear is not baseless, for whoever has entered the darkness has never returned Thus this fire has a very central role to play in our lives It has been there for as long as memory goes back into the past One is often tempted to ask who created it in the first place you can depend upon monkeys to let their curiosity rule them While over the years, organized efforts have been made to increase it by feeding wood and thus increasing perimeter of its light one must add quite successfully the question of its origins remain debate able Some argue that it was always there but imagination finds it hard to deal with infinities These days it is even contested that it was a result of an explosion. However, a widely accepted view has been that the Old Man did it The Old Man, who it has been claimed, lives outside the perimeter of light Many monkeys have repeatedly claimed to see him there although their descriptions of him are so widely different from one another that it render any explanation impossible And they keep fighting among each other as to whose description is better than other Another thing for which you can depend on monkeys for to form their opinions on things they know nothing about and then fight to prove they are right. They have formed factions major as well as minor There is, for example, a faction, J, which is sure there is an Old Man and he is very kind since as, so the legend goes, this old man first asked one of our ancestors to kill his son but later out of total mercy told him he

need not do so Kind, isn't it There is another faction, C, which argues that the old man actually once sent his son among us, named Jay Cee after doing a plastic surgery on him to give him the form of a monkey I personally think that that the son, if there is a son, wouldn't have agreed to go through plastic surgery for monkeys like us. Yet another faction, I, will have it that Jay Cee was only Old Man's ambassador to our little land like many others, who had come to us to tell us about the day the fire will be dissolved and all bad monkeys will be punished Kind of makes you feel like you are in a classroom where teacher has gone out on an errand and will punish in disciplined souls on return Another faction H tells you that there are than one old man out there It is again a monkey thing to do, to go out looking for many where you haven't yet found one. And all these factions along with many others have each have at least one leave of its own Each faction claims its leave to be THE LEAVE containing the message either narrated or written by Old Man himself There are so many THE LEAVES containing so very different messages written in so many different languages one can't help but marvel Old Man's creative talents Me I personally refuse to love a leave that doesn't start with words, Burn me before you kill an innocent on my account If any of my fellow monkeys happen to be listening, forgive the mockery that runs in our monkey blood There are a few who scorn at all these factions and say there is no Old Man at all and these last are themselves scorned at in turn by rest, for others won't be reminded of that possibility There is no presence as painful as an absence that is any absence ever felt Which reminds me if any of my fellow monkeys asks, this meeting never happened, you don't know me. Anyway, some of these last who say there is no old man at all, claim the old man is an illusion the result of our vivid imagination which shows brain what it wishes to see The argument is favored by the fact that despite large extension of illuminated land as the fire has grown over the years even to areas where the Old Man was supposed to be he is still not to be found Instead he seems to have silently crawled back as if avoiding us, hiding from us May be he has too many wrinkles and feels hideous Instead, so these non-believing monkeys will have you believe, that Old Man was imagined back when fire was still new and fears high our ancestors needed a human

that could father them and in absence of such a father figure they might have imagined one In fact, we monkeys have always found it difficult to get over our daddy issues That could explain all those fights Who daddy loves the most We say us , they say us and then the fight. Whether or not, this father figure is real, these infidels argue, it is high time we become independent of him even if it is tempting to have belief in a higher figure, if only as someone to curse on a rainy day He, if he is, definitely seems to be wanting to be forgotten or wouldn't he have explained beyond doubt how he wants to be acknowledged At the moment, one cannot help but wonder whether he thinks of anything of our acknowledgement or further requests and gifts we keep on making And one doubts if he did anything at all worth acknowledging For example, how did he create the fire in first place Some argue he used woods and stones others argue that he used petrol and wood you see even on this point there has been no clarity but most seems to agree that a fire implies an old man who started it for fire, they say, can't create itself and monkeys, they all seem to be surely incapable of doing it. There is also the very nature of Old Man in fact some people think that he is not old at all still others, though very few, are sure that it is a woman and there are some who say he has a vulture head These last are considered primitive by others Also what is there to say that Old Man is not a bad guy In fact, look at the facts his messages have created only confusion and differences We are fighting with each other stupidly one could claim that he is making us fight each other for his entertainment powerful have always made fun of powerless the temptation is just too strong Just look at how we monkeys play with insects Yes, I insist upon it The Old Man is just making fun of us it sure must be hard for a man in his position not to laugh at our monkeyish behavior May be, may be Old Man is the biggest enemy we have There is an old proverb among us a good impostor is one that would have you cut your tail and that of others, give them to him her and still have you believe that he she is good and has done you a favor. Anyway the hard truth remains one can never be sure. And yet all these factions are so sure of being right they must kill others to prove it in service to or protection of Old Man they say At times, one walks along perimeter of the fire's light for a lone walk, dejected with all this barbarian

behavior and looks outside the perimeters hoping yes hoping for sometimes one can't help it hoping to see him And yet, all the while being sure that there would be nothing but darkness visible. The recent so called scandalous revelations about Kafka's personal library as if turns out he read a slightly edgy quarterly of arts literature prompt me to say something about his work For my Goodreads list, I suppose it must be this book, an inevitable choice but nonetheless indispensable I should add, too, that I can't really specify when I read the COLLECTED STORIES I began doing so in the 1960's never stopped To read Kafka is to be carried away by the imagination of the century just ended, a dream facility which bodied forth core images of our changing condition, armed with new technologies but saddled with ancient hatreds fears The most famous such image, to be sure, is that of the breadwinner turned into a bug, The Metamorphosis, naturally that nightmare domestic comedy is in here But this collection also has far shorter yet likewise spot on renderings out of our developing collective unconscious, such as A Hunger Artist, ever essential reading for anyone trying to following a creative calling amid the materialist hurly burly More intense distillations are served, as well, in what would come to be called flash fic But even at the length of a couple of pages or less, Kafka generates blinking terror breathtaking cultural reach, in the bloody labyrinth of A Country Doctor or the heady blind alley of On Parables At every length, is the astonishment, the rhetoric's perfectly modulated, with every correlation description thought given just the development, the finish, needed to serve the vision in play Kafka insists on the primacy of that vision, never flashy, his good judgment eliminating anything that might distract, might suggest artist matters than art The cult of personality that's grown up around him, over the last few decades, is one of the most galling travesties of our literary culture In Kafka's stories, the lengthiest to the most abbreviated, we are reminded that even our corrupted shit stained times may still be cleansed by the outflow of humanity's purest storytelling impulses. I first bought this in 2009, in an edition where Vintage had removed the full stops from the text in error, or to lure me into some Kafkaesque trap Thanks, Vintage I complained and received a freebie of Bulgakov's The Heart of a Dog instead I parked the stories for a long time, until

this moment in time, when I revisited the most terrifying story in the universe, *The Metamorphosis*, the most horrific and significant story in the universe *Inside the Penal Colony*, the breathtaking debut *Description of a Struggle*, the claustrophobic mindbender *The Burrow*, the excruciatingly tedious *Investigations of a Dog*, and the bountiful sequence of short fables, sketches, and oddities, separated here into stories published and unpublished in his lifetime by Gabriel Josipovici, with full stops reinstated This edition uses the Edwin Willa Muir translations for the most part with several other couple combo contributions, and serves as the perfect definitive edition of Franz's stories for your lifetime's bookshelf. *The Complete Stories Brings Together All Of Kafka's Stories, From The Classic Tales Such As The Metamorphosis, In The Penal Colony, And A Hunger Artist To Shorter Pieces And Fragments That Max Brod, Kafka's Literary Executor, Released After Kafka's Death With The Exception Of His Three Novels, The Whole Of Kafka's Narrative Work Is Included In This Volume*

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Two Introductory Parables Before The Law Imperial Message Longer Stories Description Of A Struggle Wedding Preparations In The Country Judgment Metamorphosis In The Penal Colony Village Schoolmaster The Giant Mole Blumfeld, And Elderly Bachelor Warden Of The Tomb Country Doctor Hunter Gracchus Hunter Gracchus A Fragment Great Wall Of China News Of The Building Of The Wall A Fragment Report To An Academy Report To An Academy Two Fragments Refusal Hunger Artist Investigations Of A Dog Little Woman The Burrow Josephine The Singer, Or The Mouse Folk Children On A Country Road The Trees Clothes Excursion Into The Mountains Rejection The Street Window The Tradesman Absent Minded Window Gazing The Way Home Passers By On The Tram Reflections For Gentlemen Jockeys The Wish To Be A Red Indian Unhappiness Bachelor's Ill Luck Unmasking A Confidence Trickster The Sudden Walk Resolutions A Dream Up In The Gallery A Fratricide The Next Village A Visit To A Mine Jackals And Arabs The Bridge The Bucket Rider The New Advocate An Old Manuscript The Knock At The Manor Gate Eleven Sons My Neighbor A Crossbreed A Sport The Cares Of A Family Man A Common Confusion The Truth About Sancho Panza The Silence Of The Sirens Prometheus The City Coat Of Arms

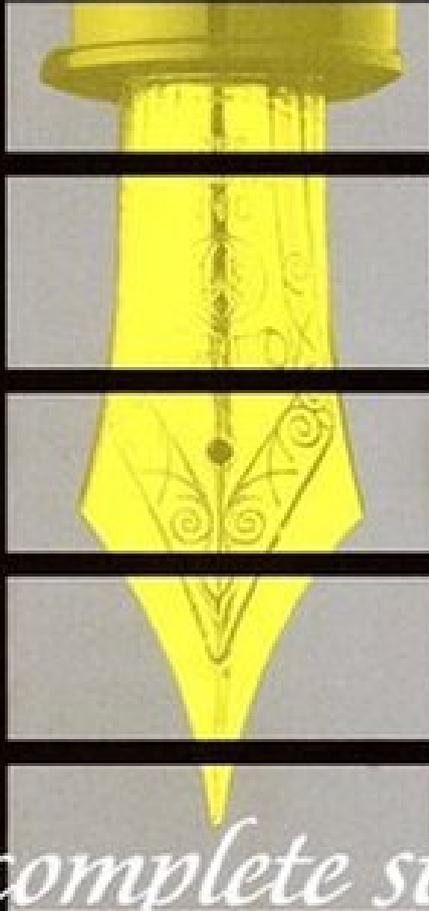
Poseidon Fellowship At Night The Problem Of Our Laws The Conscripton Of Troops The Test The Vulture The Helmsman The Top A Little Fable Home Coming First Sorrow The Departure Advocates The Married Couple Give It Up On Parables Kafka placed his own stories in a specific canon, included in the previous book I reviewed, called The Metamorphosis and Other Stories I agree with Kafka Those stories stand out among the rest However, reading all of his shorts gave me no less pleasure I liked his shorter stories most, as they packed meaning and depth into a small speck, like the small matter scientists say blew up into the Universe I love the way Kafka describes settings I love the way he makes me feel Two stories I could not finish I ll have to come back to them later Investigations of a Dog and The Burrow These read like essays than stories and I m holding on to them for a day when I get a Kafka craving Updike mentions in the beginning the term Kafkaesque originated from his novels I anticipate reading these three novels and have ordered them already I also look forward to reading Kafka s journals, which also make way to me in the mail He has an unbelievable way with words He s the first writer to take me into another world without creating another world He has no Hobbits or Aes Sedai, no hybrid man creatures or Spider Morph babies eating their mothers when they drop from the womb He speaks of a normal world but through the lens of his mind, and it transforms into a beautiful place People say Kafkaesque refers to that creepy feeling you can t quite put a finger on I get that now His stories make you laugh or react in some surface way, then something grows inside the back of your mind and a double meaning invades It doesn t reveal all but you know it hides there, and it scares you deep down I had an experience a few days ago, the Kafka mind invaded, and it helped me understand the endeared term derived from his name I had been promoted so I hid in the bathroom I dropped to my knees and palms, placed my face on the floor and said thanks to God Then I thought, what if a Black Widow crawls out from behind the toilet and bites me and I die right here giving God thanks Funny in a sick way, ironic A good story idea religious guy drops to give God thanks and dies of a spider bite The irony he sees God as good, for that moment, but God or nature or the Universe sends a spider to kill him That strange, conflicted way of

thinking defines Kafkaesque for me Kafka has claimed the number one place on my favorite authors list I can't wait to read the novels and all his nonfiction What an amazing soul Probably most readable, rhythmic and rounded among these tales, so much so that I forced my brother to listen to me reading it aloud to him, is *The Great Wall of China*, which contains the immortal parable of the messenger. Kafka's tales are oblique, frequently, I think, resisting reading in terms of established philosophical or ideological positions Their psychological resonance is immense, even when it's difficult to pin a definitive meaning to the action, to divine the motivations of the characters, or to suck out an aphorism Tales like *The Metamorphosis* describe the atmosphere of the period almost by exquisitely carving out the negative space *Investigations of a Dog* is another of my favourites, interrogating, indirectly but with keen clear sight, unspoken anxieties and motivations behind social habits, and perhaps religious practices. I have a theory that every honest reader will find themselves uncomfortably, of course in Kafka I am the animal narrator protagonist of *The Burrow*, who obsesses over its home's security and defences, and experiences bliss rolling on the floor of one of its chambers in brief, luxurious forgetfulness Reflecting on this is quite therapeutic for me I am able to challenge myself. At the very corner dividing the two streets Wese paused, only his walking stick came around into the other street to support him A sudden whim The night sky invited him, with its dark blue and its gold Unknowing, he gazed up at it, unknowing he lifted his hat and stroked his hair nothing up there drew together in a pattern to interpret the immediate future for him everything stayed in its senseless, inscrutable place In itself it was a highly reasonable action that Wese should walk on, but he walked onto Schmar's knife from *A Fratricide* Trying to review Kafka without simply resorting to a string of tired adjectives claustrophobic, absurd, paranoid, circuitous, nightmarish, labyrinthine, despair inducing, paradoxical is a task about as futile as any to be found in a Kafka story but then again, what is any review of a great book if not an exercise in futility You don't need me to tell you Kafka is great, because you know Kafka is great, because everyone knows Kafka is great, and on and on forever Even if you've never read him, the name probably evokes images of an

unfortunate man being turned into an insect or tortured in a penal colony or tried for a crime no one will say You know when a situation is Kafkaesque, just as you know when it is Orwellian or Lovecraftian or Dickensian or Shakespearean Side note ever wonder why women writers are never given the name as descriptor treatment Why no Austenesque or Woolfian When the culture is saturated with an artist's influence like it is with Kafka's, it can seem almost redundant to experience that artist's work firsthand What else can there possibly be to glean The irony, of course, is that the best artists are the ones it's least possible to imitate or explain, and a classic really worth that title will almost always evoke surprise rather than familiarity Kafka reheated two or three times over is not really Kafka at all, no matter how Kafkaesque it may seem at face value Going into the *Collected Stories*, I thought I knew or less what to expect the existential panic, the desensitizing bureaucracy, the unanswered questions shouted into a disinterested or malevolent void And of course you can find all of that here the stereotypes have an ample foundation in reality. What I didn't anticipate, though, was the heart the tenderness with which Kafka regards even or maybe especially his most ridiculous and self-defeating characters the pointlessly dueling pairs in *A Little Woman* and *The Village Schoolmaster*, the lonely and pathetic tunnel dweller in *The Burrow*, the self-absorbed rodent diva in *Josephine the Singer* I was primed to expect a little humor, of a pitch black and cynical kind, but not the snort out loud silliness of the creature Odradek in *The Cares of a Family Man* or the self-parodying pessimism of *Reflections for Gentleman Jockeys* And whatever I've come to expect from the nowadays largely predictable and uninspired genre we call magical realism, it has little to do with the almost alien dreaminess of the imagery and atmosphere on display through nearly every story of this collection. Don't get me wrong Kafka does give us plenty of fear and isolation and failure to communicate and needless cruelty and all those other Kafkaesque buzzwords The perpetual anxiety of his characters, along with the bodily contortions and discomfort that so often accompany it, were literally painfully familiar to me as a sufferer of chronic anxiety The meaningless corporate hoop jumping and purgatorial workplace setpieces are still, as so many have said already, shockingly recognizable in our age

of cubicles and Excel spreadsheets And it would be unjust not to mention that Kafka, a German speaking Jew who died in Vienna in 1924, clearly understood the reassuring numbness of bureaucratic ritual and the brutal uses to which it could be put decades before his own sisters and millions of others were sent to die in the Nazis ghettos and concentration camps. But it is not all doom and gloom and humorless jokes from a cruel universe Kafka wasn't some college sopho self styling as a nihilist, arrogantly assured of the rightness of his own unbeliefs So much of his writing, especially the ultra short, flash fiction y pieces that I count as my favorites, are suffused with real curiosity and surprise, even whimsy Yes, I said it Kafka is whimsical Most of his protagonists are sympathetic, if a little aloof, just normal ish working people trying their best to reach an understanding with their neighbors and make sense of a senseless world They're neurotic, yes, but who isn't And for all the stories pervasive uneasiness, there's also a no less pervasive feeling of wonder as if the half dreams that come just before or after real sleep have somehow been captured and made frighteningly tangible. Not every story in this compilation is a masterpiece Half of them weren't published in Kafka's lifetime, and many of those were never completed I was bored by the lengthy, narrative eschewing surrealism of *Description of a Struggle*, and some of the longer pieces *Investigations of a Dog*, *The Burrow* read like tedious philosophical experiments than stories in a strict sense Quite a few of Kafka's works *The Hunger Artist* being the most famous serve mainly as vehicles for his musings on the creative life, and, while some readers may argue, I tend to find that such writerly navel gazing works best in small doses, if at all Generally speaking, in fact, I think that K is at his best in the very short fictions paragraph or page long impressions that introduce a striking image but don't let us get too familiar There are famous exceptions, of course *The Metamorphosis* and *In the Penal Colony* deserve all the attention they get, but for the most part it was the micro stories that inspired the most macro response in me. If I were self aware, maybe I'd have taken that lesson to heart and kept this review short too But then again, Kafka has the advantage here he has to condense only the experience of living I, on the other hand, have to condense Kafka.

franz kafka



the complete stories

FOREWORD BY JOHN UPDIKE