

Kafka Competition Entry by Peter Fockema

The Egg State:

A drawn, worn-out looking man stood on the platform as he coolly observed his train coming in twenty-five minutes later than he had been gruffly informed by the conductor. "Twenty-five minutes, typical!", our tired Otto Vidar thought, "What a sign of the times!". Otto clipped shut the book he had been reading and stomped onto the train then strode down the aisle until he found an empty table with a window view, upon which he unceremoniously collapsed into the seat. The table was messy, with today's newspaper strewn over the top. As the train lurched forward Otto sighed and picked up one of the sheets of the newspaper in front of him. "Curious!" he thought as he perused an article on the average stages of metamorphosis for insects. "Stage one for the egg, two for the larval state, three's the pupa, finally the adult insect as the ultimate form. Is that truly typical of most insects?". Otto inspected the article before him as a butterfly regarded him from the comfort of a printed diagram. For a moment, he imagined himself an insect, "Not a butterfly- modernity and current architecture has done for that! No, rather a cockroach that can survive in the ugliness of what our cities have become!"

Otto gazed out of the streaked, grimy train window onto the bleakness of generic, mass-produced houses squashed in amongst each other in the latest housing development, like cells in a honeycomb but far less aesthetic. Otto's upper lip extended in a sneer at the sight, providing an onlooking young lady with a glimpse of his opalescent teeth. "Honeycombs", he mused, "Didn't that Roman Varro chap have something to say about those? Easier to fit more in", he thought, "Except in this case, it's not honey, but more squalid people!"

Otto's green eyes flicked back to the paper and scanned for the next article to read, a mildly generic piece about how unfair the world was. "It's always someone else's fault...", Otto thought, "Even when it's not, surely they could find a way to make the best of their situation?". It wasn't the first item of that vein which Otto had read, and it certainly wouldn't be the last.

The train slid into Otto's stop inelegantly, not at all like an eel in water, but how one would imagine a centipede would move, its head swinging inquisitively from side to side, before ponderously stopping at its next food source. It was time to clamber off the train and drag himself home, Otto thought, before doing just that and making his way through the concrete streets of a part of town barely thirty years old, the occasional shards of glass and gravel crunching beneath his feet where once shards of grass would have grown.

Otto reached his door and pulled from the mailbox a letter which he glanced at as he opened his door, noting it was addressed to "O.V", he then crossed the threshold.

The Larval State:

His skin felt bumpy. Hot. Very hot. "O. V. You're feverish!" he thought. O.V. found himself stretched out on his bedroom floor blearily searching for something, anything, that had a reflection to indicate to him his current state.

Irritated, O.V. felt a surge of anger and lurched himself up and onto the bed and landed, quite fortuitously, with his head on the pillow. As he drifted off to sleep, he heard a voice, mellifluous, authoritative, with an inflection that denoted a seductive cleverness. "Oh, O.V.!" the voice said. O.V. felt a presence shifting around him, fluid and combative. "My stars!" he thought, with alarm. Suddenly the shadows melted off the walls and immediately the room was blindingly bright. O.V. could see clearly now and what he saw was a group of women, "No!", he thought, "Ladies! These are ladies!". O.V. continued to judge his vision, "Strange, my sight is returned to me and everything else is clear and ordinary. But these ladies, I can't quite put my finger on it- they are ethereal!"

Of these three ladies, all were golden-haired and seemingly flickered before him, yet clearly distinctive in their personalities. The lady in the centre had a stern, imperious expression and posture, and was flanked on the left by a character O.V. perceived as "Innocently flirtatious", whilst on the right the lady was "A sort of cross between a playful person and a university tutor".

The lady on the left then spoke; "He's graced, quite literally, as a Grace I have a right to say that!"

"Ha! Let me muse on that, as a Muse I have a right to do so!" called out the lady on the right.

The centre lady now interceded, "I think it's clear why Aglaea, Clio, and myself, Athena, are here. You have talent, you can influence for the better- but you don't know it yet. I suggest you ruminate on that!"

With that, O.V. collapsed into slumber.

The Pupa State:

As he slept, O.V. observed two men before him, both had contemplated change, both had written about metamorphosis. He recognised one as a modern chap, Kafka, who wrote about a man's transformation, looking inwards. The other was decidedly more classical and wrote about change he observed that was affected by the gods- change that was inherently more divine. "That's Ovid", O.V. realised. Suddenly, O.V. understood, this was his choice, this would decide who he would be. O.V. made up his mind. "I'll be the new Ovid!", he then woke with a start.

The Adult State:

Ovid crossed the room to the window and looked out on a world still slumbering, it was a blank sheet of paper ready to be marked with greatness once more. It wasn't a butterfly within his mind's eye at all but rather a moth he envisioned, for it was out of the night that covered him from which he would ascend. He had his task. Now was the time to reintroduce some grace into his habitat.