

## Audio file

[2024-11-12 KST Kafka 04 Before the Law v1.mp3](#)

## Transcript

Before the law. Before the law stands a doorkeeper. A man from the country comes to this doorkeeper, and asks for admission to the law. But the doorkeeper says he cannot grant him admission now. The man reflects and then asks if he will therefore be permitted to enter later. "It is possible," the doorkeeper says, "but not now." Since the gate to the law is open as always and the doorkeeper steps aside, the man bends down to look through the gate into the interior. When the doorkeeper notices this, he laughs and says: "If you find it so tempting, then try to enter despite my prohibition. But take note: I am powerful. And I am only the lowest doorkeeper. From room to room, however, stand doorkeepers, each one more powerful than the last. The mere sight of the third is more than even I can bear." The man from the country had not expected such difficulties; the law is, after all, meant to be accessible to everybody at all times, he thinks, but now, as he looks more closely at the doorkeeper in his fur coat, his large, pointed nose and his long, thin black Tatar beard, he decides that he would actually prefer to wait until he receives permission to enter. The doorkeeper gives him a stool and lets him sit to the side of the door. He sits there for days and for years. He makes many attempts to gain admission, and tires the doorkeeper with his pleading. The doorkeeper often subjects him to a little questioning asks him about his homeland and much else besides, but these are indifferent questions like those posed by great gentlemen, and in the end, he always tells him that he cannot admit him yet. The man, who equipped himself with many items for his journey, uses everything, no matter how valuable it is, to bribe the doorkeeper. The latter does indeed accept everything, but also adds: "I am accepting it only so you don't think that you neglected something." Throughout those many years, the man observes the doorkeeper almost continuously. He forgets the other doorkeepers, and this first one seems to him to be the only obstacle to his being admitted to the law. He curses this unlucky coincidence, recklessly and loudly in the early years, and later as he grows old, simply mutters to himself. He becomes childish, and since he has during his long years studying the doorkeeper, spotted the fleas in his fur collar, he asks even the fleas to help him change the doorkeeper's mind. Finally, his eyesight weakens and he doesn't know whether it is really getting darker around him, or whether his eyes are merely deceiving him. Yet now he perceives amid the darkness a radiance which bursts out inextinguishable from the door of the law. He does not live much longer. Before he dies, all the experiences of the whole time come together in his mind as a question that he has not yet asked the doorkeeper. He beckons to him, for he can no longer straighten his stiffening

body. The doorkeeper has to bend down low to him for the difference in height has greatly changed to the disadvantage of the man. "So now what else do you want to know?" The doorkeeper asks. "You are insatiable." "But everyone strives towards the law," the man said. "How is it that during these many years no one, except for me requested admission?" The doorkeeper realises that the man is nearing his end, and in order to reach his diminished hearing, he roars at him: "Nobody else could be admitted here since this entrance was intended for you alone. I shall go now and close it."