

## In One's Own House

“You can never tell what can happen in one's own house.” —Rosa, a character in Kafka's *The Country Doctor*

In Franz Kafka's 5-page short story, a country doctor is called to a patient's home but knows his horse has died the night before. For reasons unknown to the doctor, out of his stable “buttock two muscular horses” and behind them an animalistic groom who seems to take a bite of Rosa, the doctor's housemaid. The doctor's buggy is transported by these magical horses to his patient's home in a matter of seconds while the doctor knows that back at his home the unknown groom will be doing more than playing doctor with Rosa.

While listening to commentary on this unusual story (is there anything that Kafka wrote that isn't unusual?), it occurred to me that Rosa's statement is true in every home and, by extension, in every dojo. Ironically, it is true of every great work of literature as well.

Parents may not know what their children are viewing on the Internet or what they are doing on the way home from school. A wife does not know which co-worker her husband would like to take a business trip with, nor does he know which co-worker has been hitting on her at the water cooler. Similarly, sensei do not know what relationships develop in the dojo—and I am not talking here about romantic relationships, but instructional relationships. Seniors influence juniors not only in the way outlined by Sensei, but also by their own personalities and tendencies. Even their peers influence each other at every rank. Green belt Dizzy Gruntle's quiet badmouthing of Sonia Shodan's instructional method takes its toll on the wider dojo. If Aino Enuff and his friends get together to protest the lack of advanced kata instruction, but never approach Sensei with a plan to help make it happen, their discontent will be felt throughout the student body.

All Sensei can do is try to keep all students happy while keeping his status as CEO, chairman of the board, governor of the commonwealth, and doctor of the village. Once he loses that status, no one will be happy, everyone will find something to complain about, and the dojo will fall apart. However, forcing that status on students by compelling this, that, or the other thing, can start student unrest, as well. No sensei, doctor or head of family can control the communication that takes place *sub-rosa* in either a house or a dojo. One can only hope to frame it with rules of propriety that seem reasonable and easy for people to accept.

In Kafka's story, the country doctor's patient has an ugly wound that is pink (“rosa” in the original language) and the villagers make the doctor lie down naked beside his own patient as if he has been reduced to the level of witchdoctor as pink worms crawl from the patient's wound. He is confronted with a wound that may be fatal while thinking of the groom violating his maid. He is forced to lie down naked with his patient as Rosa may, at the same moment, be forced to lie down naked with the groom. Should he have accepted the suspicious magic horses that allowed him to tend to his duties? Or should he have rejected them and stayed home to protect his housemaid, whether or not he had a personal romantic interest in her? Circumstances in his home put him between a rock and a hard place. We might ask ourselves, how could the country doctor have prevented his plight?

How can Sensei have prevented negative interactions that take place in his own dojo? How can his students help him do so? The answer to the first question is for Sensei to accept that treatment, not just charity, begins at home. The answer to the second is for students to reject the position of either the aggressive groom or the passive housemaid. The rules of the dojo are not enough.

Kafka's text says and I agree, "Writing prescriptions is easy. Communicating with people is hard."