

## **A Fratricide, by Franz Kafka Benjamin Pritchard**

I picked out the short story “A Fratricide” by Franz Kafka because I have always liked the author Kafka, whose works I discovered in high school while reading an anthology of short literature. This story, whose title refers to the act of killing a brother, relates an incident of violent murder.

As the story opens, the murderer, a man named Schmar, waits in the darkness to ambush Wese, another man who Schmar later refers to as “a friend” and “alehouse crony” (Kakfa, 1907, paragraph 10).

When Wese appears, Schmar proceeds to stab him to death. A third character, Pallas – whose name may be an allusion to the Greek goddess of Wisdom – is perched above, watching eagerly, not wanting to miss anything (Kakfa, 1907).

Although Kafka doesn’t explicitly spell out the reasons for the murder, the motive of romantic jealousy is hinted at: immediately after the killing, Shmar proclaims “Wese! You will never see Julia again!” (Kakfa, 1907, paragraph 9).

One thing that is emphasized in the story is how completely unexpectedly the murder is thrust upon Wese, who is simply out for an impromptu evening stroll. The arbitrary and capricious nature of the murder is representative of Kafka’s dark and unsettling style in general, which often tends to feature powerful and malevolent forces lurking out of sight, just waiting to ambush us around the next corner.

Kafka even asks: “Why did Pallas, the private citizen who was watching it all from his window near by in the second story, permit it to happen?” (Kakfa, 1907, paragraph 4).

This question is a powerful one, and seems to be the central question posed in Kafka’s story: what power does wisdom have over the capricious and ubiquitous violence that is such a feature of our modern world?

### **References**

Kafka, F (1917). A Fratricide. Retrieved from: <http://www.flashfictiononline.com/fpublic0062-fratricide-franz-kafka.html>