



ETHER LIBRARY

0019

The Metamorphosis

Die Verwandlung

Franz Kafka

1915

Fiction · Short Works

The Metamorphosis

Die Verwandlung

Franz Kafka

Translated from the German by Ether Library

ETHER LIBRARY

Die Verwandlung

Franz Kafka (1883–1924)

Translated from the German by Ether Library

First published in 1915 in the monthly *Die weißen Blätter*, and as a book the same year by Kurt Wolff Verlag, Leipzig.

A Note on the Translation

This is a complete translation of Franz Kafka's *Die Verwandlung*, made directly from the German. No earlier English version was used as its basis. The source is a public-domain transcription of the Kurt Wolff edition (Leipzig, in the series *Der jüngste Tag*), in a printing dated 1917, which reproduces the text first published in 1915.

Kafka divides the story into three parts marked only with Roman numerals; we head them "Part I," "Part II," and "Part III." Each of Kafka's ninety-seven paragraphs appears here as one paragraph, neither split nor merged, including the long ones in which several people speak in turn. His long sentences have been kept long wherever their length does the work: the hedging, self-correcting, office-minded logic of Gregor's thinking is part of the story. Repetitions are kept as well.

In the first sentence Gregor wakes to find himself transformed into *ein ungeheueres Ungeziefer*. *Ungeziefer* is an everyday word for vermin of any kind, the unclean pests a household wants rid of; it names no species, and Kafka never says what Gregor has become. We have therefore avoided "insect," "beetle," and "cockroach," each of which decides what the original leaves open, and written "a monstrous vermin." The singular is a little strange in English, as *ein Ungeziefer* is a little strange in German. When the cleaning woman later calls Gregor an "old dung beetle," that is her word, not the narrator's.

Names are kept in their German form (Gregor Samsa, Grete). Spelling and punctuation are American. There are no translator's notes.

Contents

Part I	6
Part II	25
Part III	45

Part I

One morning, as Gregor Samsa was waking up from restless dreams, he found himself transformed in his bed into a monstrous vermin. He was lying on his back, which was as hard as armor plate, and when he lifted his head a little he could see his dome-shaped brown belly, divided by arching ribs, on the crest of which the blanket, about to slide off altogether, could barely keep its hold. His many legs, pitifully thin compared with the rest of his bulk, flickered helplessly before his eyes.

“What has happened to me?” he thought. It was no dream. His room, a proper human room, only a little too small, lay quiet between its four familiar walls. Above the table, on which a sample collection of cloth goods lay unpacked and spread out (Samsa was a traveling salesman), hung the picture he had recently cut out of an illustrated magazine and put in a pretty gilt frame. It showed a lady, fitted out with a fur hat and a fur stole, sitting upright and raising toward the viewer a heavy fur muff into which her whole forearm had disappeared.

Gregor’s eyes then turned to the window, and the dismal weather—you could hear raindrops striking the tin of the window ledge—made him quite melancholy. “What if I went on sleeping a little longer and forgot all this nonsense,” he thought, but that was entirely impossible, for he was used to sleeping on his right side and in his present state could not get himself into that position. However hard he flung himself onto his right side, he kept rocking back onto his back. He must have tried it a hundred times, closing his eyes so as not to have to see his floundering legs, and he

stopped only when he began to feel in his side a faint, dull ache he had never felt before.

“Oh God,” he thought, “what a grueling job I’ve picked! On the road day in, day out. The business worries are much greater than in the actual office back home, and on top of that I’m saddled with the torment of traveling, the anxiety over train connections, the bad and irregular meals, and human company that is always changing, never lasting, never growing warm. The devil take it all!” He felt a slight itch high up on his belly; slowly pushed himself on his back closer to the bedpost so that he could lift his head better; found the itching spot, which was covered with nothing but little white dots he could make no sense of; and tried to feel the place with one of his legs, but drew it back at once, for the touch sent cold shivers through him.

He slid back into his former position. “All this getting up early,” he thought, “turns a man into an idiot. A man has to have his sleep. Other salesmen live like harem women. For instance, when I go back to the inn during the morning to write up the orders I’ve taken, these gentlemen are only just sitting down to breakfast. I should try that with my boss; I’d be thrown out on the spot. Who knows, though, whether that wouldn’t be a very good thing for me. If I didn’t hold back for my parents’ sake, I’d have given notice long ago, I’d have gone up to the boss and told him what I think of him from the bottom of my heart. He’d have fallen off his desk! It’s an odd habit too, sitting up on the desk and talking down from that height at the employee, who has to come right up close besides, because the boss is hard of hearing. Well, I haven’t given up hope entirely; once I’ve got the money together to pay off what my parents owe him—it should take another five or six years—I’ll do it, no question. Then I’ll make the clean break. For the time being, of course, I have to get up, because my train leaves at five.”

And he looked over at the alarm clock, which was ticking on the wardrobe. "Heavenly Father!" he thought. It was half past six, and the hands were moving calmly forward; it was even past the half hour, it was getting close to a quarter to seven. Could the alarm not have gone off? You could see from the bed that it was set correctly for four o'clock; surely it had gone off, too. Yes, but was it possible to sleep peacefully through that furniture-rattling ring? Well, he hadn't slept peacefully, but probably all the more soundly for it. But what should he do now? The next train left at seven; to catch it he would have had to rush like a madman, and the samples weren't packed yet, and he himself didn't feel particularly fresh or lively. And even if he caught the train, there would be no avoiding a blowup from the boss, because the firm's errand boy had waited for the five o'clock train and reported his absence long ago. The errand boy was the boss's creature, without spine or brains. What if he called in sick? But that would be extremely embarrassing and suspicious, because in his five years with the firm Gregor had not been sick even once. The boss would certainly come with the health-insurance doctor, would reproach his parents for their lazy son, and would cut off every objection by referring to the health-insurance doctor, for whom there exist only people who are perfectly healthy but averse to work. And would the doctor be so very wrong, in this case? Apart from a drowsiness that was really superfluous after so long a sleep, Gregor in fact felt quite well and even had an especially hearty appetite.

As he was turning all this over in the greatest haste, unable to make up his mind to leave the bed—the clock was just striking a quarter to seven—there came a cautious knock at the door by the head of his bed. "Gregor," a voice called—it was his mother—"it's a quarter to seven. Weren't you going to leave?" That gentle voice! Gregor was startled when he heard his own voice answering; it was unmistakably his old voice, but mixed into it, as if from some-

where below, was an irrepressible, painful squeaking that left the words clear only for the first moment and then so wrecked them in their echo that you could not tell whether you had heard right. Gregor had meant to answer at length and explain everything, but under the circumstances he confined himself to saying, "Yes, yes, thank you, Mother, I'm getting up now." Because of the wooden door, the change in Gregor's voice probably could not be noticed outside, for his mother was satisfied with this answer and shuffled off. But the little exchange had made the other members of the family aware that Gregor, against all expectation, was still at home, and already his father was knocking at one of the side doors, weakly, but with his fist. "Gregor, Gregor," he called, "what's the matter?" And after a short while he warned him again in a deeper voice: "Gregor! Gregor!" At the other side door, however, his sister was softly lamenting: "Gregor? Aren't you well? Do you need anything?" Gregor answered in both directions, "I'm all ready," and tried, by the most careful pronunciation and by leaving long pauses between the words, to strip his voice of anything conspicuous. His father did go back to his breakfast, but his sister whispered, "Gregor, open the door, I beg you." Gregor, however, had no intention of opening up, and instead congratulated himself on the precaution, adopted from his travels, of locking all the doors at night, even at home.

First he wanted to get up quietly and undisturbed, get dressed, and above all have breakfast, and only then think about what came next, for he could tell that in bed his brooding would never come to a sensible conclusion. He remembered having often felt some slight pain or other in bed, caused perhaps by lying awkwardly, which turned out to be pure imagination once he got up, and he was curious to see how today's fancies would gradually dissolve. That the change in his voice was nothing but the forerunner of a

bad cold, an occupational disease of traveling salesmen, he did not doubt in the least.

Throwing off the blanket was quite simple; he only had to puff himself up a little and it fell off by itself. But after that things got difficult, especially because he was so uncommonly wide. He would have needed arms and hands to raise himself; instead he had only all these little legs, which were constantly moving in every different way and which, what was more, he could not control. If he wanted to bend one of them, the first thing it did was stretch out; and if he finally succeeded in making this leg do what he wanted, all the others meanwhile were working away, as if let loose, in the most intense and painful agitation. "Just don't lie around uselessly in bed," Gregor told himself.

At first he wanted to get out of bed with the lower part of his body, but this lower part, which, incidentally, he had not yet seen and of which he could form no clear idea, proved too hard to move; it went so slowly; and when at last, almost frantic, he gathered all his strength and recklessly shoved himself forward, he had chosen the wrong direction and banged hard into the bottom bed-post, and the burning pain he felt taught him that the lower part of his body was, at the moment, perhaps the most sensitive of all.

So he tried to get the upper part of his body out of bed first, and carefully turned his head toward the edge of the bed. This was easily done, and in spite of its width and weight the mass of his body finally followed the turn of his head, slowly. But when at last he was holding his head outside the bed in the open air, he grew afraid of advancing any further in this way, for if he finally let himself fall like that, it would take nothing short of a miracle for his head not to be injured. And he must not lose consciousness now, of all times, at any price; he would rather stay in bed.

But when, after the same effort, he lay there sighing just as before, and again saw his little legs fighting one another, if any-

thing even worse than before, and could find no way of bringing calm and order to this anarchy, he told himself once more that he could not possibly stay in bed and that the most sensible thing was to sacrifice everything if there was even the slightest hope of freeing himself from the bed by doing so. At the same time, though, he did not forget to remind himself now and then that calm reflection, the calmest possible, was far better than desperate resolutions. At such moments he fixed his eyes as sharply as he could on the window, but unfortunately there was little confidence or cheer to be drawn from the sight of the morning fog, which shrouded even the other side of the narrow street. "Seven o'clock already," he told himself as the alarm clock struck again, "seven o'clock already and still such a fog." And for a little while he lay still, breathing faintly, as though perhaps he expected the complete silence to bring back the real and natural state of things.

But then he told himself: "Before it strikes a quarter past seven I absolutely must be completely out of bed. Besides, by then someone will have come from the firm to ask after me, because the office opens before seven." And he now set about rocking his body out of the bed, the whole length of it, in a perfectly even rhythm. If he let himself fall out of bed this way, his head, which he meant to lift sharply as he fell, would probably stay unhurt. His back seemed to be hard; nothing would happen to it, probably, when it fell on the carpet. What worried him most was the thought of the loud crash there was bound to be, which would probably cause, if not alarm, then at least concern behind all the doors. But it had to be risked.

When Gregor was already sticking halfway out of the bed (the new method was more a game than an effort; he only had to keep rocking himself in jerks), it occurred to him how simple everything would be if someone came to help him. Two strong people—he thought of his father and the maid—would have been quite

enough; they would only have had to push their arms under his arched back, peel him out of the bed that way, bend down with their load, and then carefully let him swing himself over onto the floor, where his little legs would then, he hoped, acquire some purpose. Well, quite apart from the fact that the doors were locked, should he really call for help? In spite of all his distress, he could not suppress a smile at the thought.

He had already got so far that, rocking harder, he could hardly keep his balance any longer, and very soon now he would have to make up his mind for good, because in five minutes it would be a quarter past seven—when the doorbell of the apartment rang. “That’s someone from the firm,” he told himself, and almost froze, while his little legs only danced all the faster. For a moment everything stayed quiet. “They aren’t opening,” Gregor told himself, caught up in some absurd hope. But then, of course, the maid went to the door with her firm step as always and opened it. Gregor needed to hear only the visitor’s first word of greeting and he already knew who it was—the chief clerk himself. Why was Gregor of all people condemned to work for a firm where the slightest lapse at once aroused the gravest suspicion? Were all the employees, one and all, scoundrels? Was there not among them a single loyal, devoted man who, if he had failed to put even a couple of morning hours to use for the firm, was driven half mad by remorse and actually unable to leave his bed? Was it really not enough to send an apprentice to ask, if all this asking was necessary at all? Did the chief clerk have to come in person, and did the whole innocent family have to be shown in this way that the investigation of this suspicious affair could be entrusted only to the chief clerk’s intelligence? And more because of the agitation these reflections put him in than because of any proper decision, Gregor swung himself out of the bed with all his might. There was a loud thump, but it was not really a crash. The fall was softened a little

by the carpet, and his back was also more elastic than Gregor had thought, which was why the dull sound was not so very noticeable. Only he had not held his head carefully enough and had banged it; he turned it and rubbed it on the carpet in anger and pain.

“Something fell in there,” said the chief clerk in the room to the left. Gregor tried to imagine whether something like what had happened to him today might not someday happen to the chief clerk as well; one really had to admit that it was possible. But as if in blunt reply to this question, the chief clerk now took a few firm steps in the next room and made his patent-leather boots creak. From the room to the right his sister whispered, to let Gregor know: “Gregor, the chief clerk is here.” “I know,” Gregor said to himself; but he did not dare raise his voice loud enough for his sister to hear.

“Gregor,” his father now said from the room to the left, “the chief clerk has come and wants to know why you didn’t leave on the early train. We don’t know what to tell him. Besides, he wants to speak to you personally. So please open the door. I’m sure he’ll be good enough to excuse the mess in your room.” “Good morning, Mr. Samsa,” the chief clerk called out pleasantly, breaking in. “He isn’t well,” his mother said to the chief clerk, while his father was still talking at the door, “he isn’t well, believe me, sir. How else would Gregor ever miss a train! The boy has nothing in his head but the business. It almost makes me cross that he never goes out in the evening; he’s been in town for a week now, and he was home every single evening. He sits there at the table with us and quietly reads the paper or studies train schedules. His idea of amusement is working with his fretsaw. For instance, over two or three evenings he carved a little frame; you’ll be amazed how pretty it is; it’s hanging in there in his room; you’ll see it as soon as Gregor opens the door. Anyway, I’m so glad you’re here, sir; on our own we’d never have got Gregor to open the door; he’s so stubborn;

and he certainly isn't well, even though he denied it this morning." "I'm coming right away," Gregor said slowly and deliberately, and did not move, so as not to lose a single word of the conversation. "I can't explain it any other way either, madam," said the chief clerk. "I hope it's nothing serious. Though on the other hand I must say that we businessmen, unfortunately or fortunately, as you like, very often simply have to overcome a slight indisposition for the sake of business." "So can the chief clerk come in to see you now?" asked his impatient father, and knocked on the door again. "No," said Gregor. In the room to the left there fell an awkward silence; in the room to the right his sister began to sob.

Why didn't his sister go and join the others? She had probably only just got out of bed and had not even started to dress. And why was she crying? Because he wasn't getting up and wasn't letting the chief clerk in, because he was in danger of losing his job, and because the boss would then start hounding his parents again with the old claims? For the time being these were surely needless worries. Gregor was still here and had not the slightest thought of abandoning his family. At the moment, granted, he was lying there on the carpet, and no one who knew his condition would seriously have demanded that he let the chief clerk in. But Gregor could hardly be dismissed on the spot for this small discourtesy, for which a suitable excuse would easily be found later on. And it seemed to Gregor that it would be much more sensible to leave him in peace now, instead of disturbing him with tears and pleading. But it was precisely the uncertainty that was distressing the others and excused their behavior.

"Mr. Samsa," the chief clerk now called, raising his voice, "what is the matter? You barricade yourself in your room, answer only yes and no, cause your parents serious and unnecessary worry, and neglect—I mention this only in passing—your business duties in a truly unheard-of manner. I am speaking here in the name of

your parents and of your employer, and I ask you, quite seriously, for an immediate and clear explanation. I am astonished, astonished. I thought I knew you as a calm, sensible person, and now you suddenly seem to want to start flaunting strange whims. This morning the head of the firm did hint to me at a possible explanation for your absence—it concerned the cash collections recently entrusted to you—but I very nearly gave my word of honor that this explanation could not be correct. Now, however, I see your incomprehensible obstinacy here, and I lose all desire to put in the slightest word for you. And your position is by no means the most secure. I originally intended to tell you all this in private, but since you are making me waste my time here for nothing, I don't see why your respected parents shouldn't hear it too. Your performance lately, then, has been very unsatisfactory; it is not the season for doing exceptional business, we recognize that; but a season for doing no business at all, Mr. Samsa, does not exist, must not exist."

"But sir," cried Gregor, beside himself, forgetting everything else in his agitation, "I'll open up right away, this very moment. A slight indisposition, a dizzy spell, has kept me from getting up. I'm still lying in bed. But I'm perfectly fresh again now. I'm just getting out of bed. Just a moment's patience! It isn't going as well as I thought. But I'm all right already. How a thing like that can just come over a person! Only last night I was perfectly fine, my parents know it, or rather, last night I already had a little premonition. Anyone should have been able to see it in my face. Why on earth didn't I report it at the office! But you always think you'll get through an illness without staying home. Sir! Spare my parents! There's no reason for all the reproaches you're making now; no one ever said a word to me about any of this. Perhaps you haven't read the last orders I sent in. Anyway, I'll still be leaving on my trip on the eight o'clock train; these few hours of rest have done me

good. Don't let me keep you, sir; I'll be at the office myself shortly, and please be so kind as to tell them so, and give my respects to the head of the firm!"

And while Gregor was blurting all this out, hardly knowing what he was saying, he had moved easily toward the wardrobe, thanks probably to the practice he had already had in bed, and was now trying to raise himself up against it. He really did want to open the door, really did want to let himself be seen and to speak with the chief clerk; he was eager to find out what the others, who were now so insistent on seeing him, would say at the sight of him. If they were horrified, then Gregor had no further responsibility and could be calm. But if they took it all calmly, then he too had no reason to get upset and could, if he hurried, actually be at the station by eight. At first he slid off the smooth wardrobe a few times, but at last he gave himself a final heave and stood upright; he paid no attention anymore to the pains in his lower belly, however much they burned. Now he let himself fall against the back of a nearby chair and held on to its edges with his little legs. With that, though, he had also regained control of himself and fell silent, for now he could listen to the chief clerk.

"Did you understand a single word?" the chief clerk asked the parents. "He isn't making fools of us, is he?" "For God's sake," cried his mother, already in tears, "maybe he's seriously ill and we're tormenting him. Grete! Grete!" she then screamed. "Mother?" his sister called from the other side. They were communicating through Gregor's room. "You have to go to the doctor right away. Gregor is sick. Hurry, get the doctor. Did you hear Gregor talking just now?" "That was the voice of an animal," said the chief clerk, strikingly quiet compared with the mother's screaming. "Anna! Anna!" his father called through the front hall into the kitchen, clapping his hands. "Get a locksmith, right now!" And already the two girls were running through the front hall with rustling skirts—how had his

sister got dressed so quickly?—and flinging open the front door of the apartment. You did not hear the door slam at all; they had probably left it open, as tends to happen in homes where some great misfortune has occurred.

Gregor, however, had become much calmer. So they could no longer understand his words, even though they had seemed clear enough to him, clearer than before, perhaps because his ear had grown used to them. But at least they now believed that something was not quite right with him, and were ready to help him. The confidence and assurance with which the first arrangements had been made did him good. He felt himself drawn once more into the circle of humankind, and from both of them, the doctor and the locksmith, without really distinguishing between them, he hoped for great and astonishing feats. In order to have as clear a voice as possible for the decisive discussions that were approaching, he coughed a little to clear his throat, taking care, though, to do so in a very muffled way, since even this noise might already sound different from a human cough, which he no longer trusted himself to judge. In the next room, meanwhile, it had become completely still. Perhaps his parents were sitting at the table with the chief clerk, whispering; perhaps they were all leaning against the door, listening.

Gregor slowly pushed himself toward the door along with the chair, let go of it there, threw himself against the door, and held himself upright against it (the pads of his little legs had a bit of something sticky on them), and there he rested for a moment from the exertion. But then he set about turning the key in the lock with his mouth. Unfortunately, it seemed that he had no real teeth—what was he supposed to grip the key with?—but his jaws, on the other hand, were certainly very strong; with their help he did in fact get the key moving, and paid no attention to the fact that he was undoubtedly doing himself some harm, for a brown liquid

came out of his mouth, flowed over the key, and dripped onto the floor. “Just listen,” said the chief clerk in the next room, “he’s turning the key.” This was a great encouragement for Gregor; but they all should have called out to him, his father and mother too: “Come on, Gregor,” they should have called, “keep at it, keep at that lock!” And imagining that they were all following his efforts with suspense, he bit down on the key with all the strength he could muster, oblivious to everything else. As the key turned further, he danced around the lock; he was holding himself upright now only by his mouth, and as needed he hung on the key or pressed it down again with the whole weight of his body. The brighter click of the lock finally snapping back positively woke Gregor up. Breathing a sigh of relief, he told himself, “So I didn’t need the locksmith after all,” and laid his head on the handle to open the door all the way.

Since he had to open the door in this way, it was actually already wide open while he himself still could not be seen. First he had to turn himself slowly around the one wing of the door, and very carefully at that, if he did not want to fall flat on his back right at the threshold. He was still busy with this difficult maneuver and had no time to pay attention to anything else when he heard the chief clerk let out a loud “Oh!”—it sounded like the rushing of the wind—and now he saw him too: being the closest to the door, he was pressing his hand against his open mouth and slowly backing away, as if driven back by some invisible, steadily pressing force. His mother (in spite of the chief clerk’s presence she stood there with her hair still undone from the night and standing on end) first looked at his father with her hands clasped, then took two steps toward Gregor and sank down in the midst of her skirts, which spread out all around her, her face sunk out of sight on her breast. His father clenched his fist with a hostile expression, as if he meant to drive Gregor back into his room, then looked uncertainly

around the living room, then shaded his eyes with his hands and wept until his mighty chest shook.

Gregor did not step into the room at all, but leaned against the inside of the door wing that was bolted shut, so that only half his body could be seen, and above it his head, tilted to one side, with which he peered across at the others. Meanwhile it had grown much lighter; on the other side of the street a section of the endless, gray-black building opposite—it was a hospital—stood out clearly, its regular windows breaking harshly through the facade; the rain was still coming down, but only in large drops, each one visible and each one, so it seemed, flung down to the ground separately. The breakfast dishes stood on the table in great abundance, for to his father breakfast was the most important meal of the day, and he would drag it out for hours reading various newspapers. On the wall directly opposite hung a photograph of Gregor from his army days, showing him as a lieutenant, his hand on his sword, smiling without a care, demanding respect for his bearing and his uniform. The door to the front hall was open, and since the front door of the apartment was open too, you could see out onto the landing and the top of the stairs leading down.

“Well,” said Gregor, well aware that he was the only one who had kept calm, “I’ll get dressed right away, pack up the samples, and be off. Will you, will you let me go? Well, sir, you can see I’m not stubborn, and I like my work; traveling is hard, but I couldn’t live without traveling. Where are you going, sir? To the office? Yes? Will you report everything truthfully? A man may be unable to work for the moment, but that’s precisely the right time to remember what he’s accomplished in the past and to consider that later, once the obstacle has been removed, he’s sure to work all the harder and with all the more concentration. I’m so very much obliged to the head of the firm, you know that perfectly well. On the other hand, I have my parents and my sister to worry about.

I'm in a tight spot, but I'll work my way out again. Only don't make it harder for me than it already is. Take my side at the office! People don't like a traveling salesman, I know. They think he earns a fortune and has a fine life of it. They just have no particular reason to think this prejudice through more carefully. But you, sir, you have a better view of how things stand than the rest of the staff, indeed, just between ourselves, a better view even than the head of the firm himself, who, in his capacity as owner, can easily let his judgment be swayed against an employee. You also know very well that the traveling salesman, who is away from the office almost all year round, can so easily become the victim of gossip, accidents, and groundless complaints, against which it is quite impossible for him to defend himself, since mostly he never hears a thing about them, and only when he has finished a trip, exhausted, does he feel at home, in his own body, the dire consequences, whose causes can no longer be traced. Sir, don't go away without saying one word to show me that you think I'm right at least in some small part!"

But at Gregor's very first words the chief clerk had already turned away, and only over his twitching shoulder did he look back at Gregor, his lips curled. And during Gregor's speech he did not stand still for a moment, but, without taking his eyes off Gregor, edged toward the door, though only very gradually, as if there were some secret prohibition against leaving the room. He was already in the front hall, and from the sudden movement with which he pulled his foot out of the living room for the last time, you might have thought he had just burned the sole of it. In the front hall, though, he stretched his right hand far out in front of him toward the stairs, as if some positively unearthly deliverance were waiting for him there.

Gregor realized that he must on no account let the chief clerk go away in this mood, if his position with the firm was not to be

put in the gravest danger. His parents did not understand all this so well; over the long years they had formed the conviction that Gregor was provided for in this firm for life, and besides, they had so much to do now with their immediate worries that they had lost all foresight. But Gregor had this foresight. The chief clerk had to be held back, calmed down, persuaded, and finally won over; Gregor's future and his family's depended on it, after all! If only his sister had been there! She was clever; she had already cried while Gregor was still lying quietly on his back. And the chief clerk, this ladies' man, would surely have let himself be guided by her; she would have shut the front door and talked him out of his fright in the front hall. But his sister was simply not there; Gregor had to act himself. And without stopping to think that he did not yet know anything about his present powers of movement, without thinking either that his speech had possibly, indeed probably, not been understood again, he let go of the door wing; pushed himself through the opening; meant to go over to the chief clerk, who was already holding on to the railing of the landing with both hands in a ridiculous way; but at once, groping for a hold, he fell down with a little cry onto his many little legs. Hardly had this happened when, for the first time that morning, he felt a sense of physical well-being; his little legs had solid ground beneath them; they obeyed him perfectly, as he noticed to his joy; they even strove to carry him wherever he wanted to go; and he already believed that the final relief of all his suffering was at hand. But at that same moment, as he lay there on the floor, rocking with suppressed motion, not far at all from his mother and right in front of her, she, who had seemed so entirely sunk in herself, suddenly jumped up, her arms stretched wide, her fingers spread, crying, "Help, for God's sake, help!"; held her head bent as if to see Gregor better, but, contradicting this, ran senselessly backward; had forgotten that the laid table stood behind her; sat down on it hastily, as if

absentmindedly, when she reached it; and seemed not to notice at all that next to her the coffee was pouring out of the big overturned pot in a full stream onto the carpet.

“Mother, Mother,” said Gregor softly, and looked up at her. For a moment he had forgotten the chief clerk entirely; on the other hand, at the sight of the flowing coffee he could not keep himself from snapping his jaws several times at the empty air. At this his mother screamed again, fled from the table, and fell into the arms of his father, who was hurrying toward her. But Gregor had no time for his parents now; the chief clerk was already on the stairs; with his chin on the railing, he was looking back one last time. Gregor took a run at him to be as sure as possible of catching up; the chief clerk must have suspected something, for he leaped down several steps at once and vanished; but he was still shouting “Ugh!” and it echoed through the whole stairwell. Unfortunately this flight of the chief clerk now seemed to throw his father, who until then had been relatively composed, into complete confusion, for instead of running after the chief clerk himself, or at least not hindering Gregor in his pursuit, he seized in his right hand the chief clerk’s walking stick, which the man had left behind on a chair along with his hat and overcoat, took a large newspaper from the table with his left, and, stamping his feet, set about driving Gregor back into his room by waving the stick and the newspaper. No pleading of Gregor’s helped, no pleading was even understood; however humbly he turned his head, his father only stamped his feet harder. Across the room his mother had flung open a window despite the cool weather, and, leaning out, she pressed her face into her hands far outside the window. Between the lane and the stairwell a strong draft sprang up, the window curtains flew up, the newspapers on the table rustled, single sheets blew across the floor. Relentlessly his father pressed forward, uttering hissing noises like a savage. But Gregor had no practice at all yet in walk-

ing backward, and it really went very slowly. If only Gregor had been allowed to turn around, he would have been in his room at once, but he was afraid of making his father impatient with the time-consuming turn, and at any moment the stick in his father's hand threatened him with a deadly blow on the back or the head. In the end, though, Gregor had no choice, for he noticed with horror that when he walked backward he could not even keep his direction; and so, with constant anxious sidelong glances at his father, he began to turn around as quickly as possible, which in reality was only very slowly. Perhaps his father noticed his good intentions, for he did not disturb him in this, but even directed the turning movement now and then from a distance with the tip of his stick. If only there hadn't been this unbearable hissing of his father's! It made Gregor lose his head entirely. He had almost turned all the way around when, always listening to this hissing, he even made a mistake and turned himself back a little. But when at last he had his head safely in front of the doorway, it turned out that his body was too wide to get through without further ado. In his present state, of course, it did not even remotely occur to his father to open the other wing of the door, say, to make enough room for Gregor to pass. His one fixed idea was that Gregor had to get into his room as fast as possible. Nor would he ever have allowed the elaborate preparations Gregor needed to raise himself upright and perhaps get through the door that way. Perhaps, as if there were no obstacle, he now drove Gregor forward with an extraordinary racket; behind Gregor it no longer sounded like the voice of just one single father; now it was really no joke anymore, and Gregor forced himself, come what may, into the doorway. One side of his body rose up, he lay at a slant in the doorway, one of his flanks was rubbed quite raw, ugly blotches were left on the white door, soon he was stuck fast and could no longer have moved by himself, the little legs on one side hung trembling up in the air,

those on the other were pressed painfully to the floor—then his father gave him a powerful shove from behind, truly a release now, and he flew, bleeding heavily, far into his room. The door was slammed shut with the stick, and then at last it was quiet.

Part II

It was not until dusk that Gregor woke from his heavy, swoonlike sleep. He would certainly have woken not much later even without being disturbed, for he felt sufficiently rested and had slept his fill, but it seemed to him that he had been woken by a fleeting footstep and the careful closing of the door to the front hall. The glow of the electric streetcar lay pale here and there on the ceiling and on the upper parts of the furniture, but down below, where Gregor was, it was dark. Slowly, still groping clumsily with his antennae, which he was only now beginning to appreciate, he pushed himself toward the door to see what had happened there. His left side seemed to be one single long, unpleasantly tight scar, and he actually had to limp on his two rows of legs. One little leg, by the way, had been badly injured in the course of the morning's events—it was almost a miracle that only one had been injured—and dragged along lifelessly behind.

Only at the door did he notice what had actually drawn him there; it had been the smell of something to eat. For there stood a bowl filled with sweet milk, in which little pieces of white bread were floating. He could almost have laughed with joy, for he was even hungrier than he had been in the morning, and at once he dipped his head into the milk almost up over his eyes. But soon he drew it back again in disappointment; not only did eating give him trouble because of his tender left side (and he could eat only if his whole body joined in, panting), but the milk, which had always been his favorite drink, and which was surely why his sister had put it in here for him, did not taste good to him at all; in fact he

turned away from the bowl almost with revulsion and crawled back into the middle of the room.

In the living room, as Gregor could see through the crack of the door, the gas had been lit, but whereas at this time of day his father usually read aloud from the afternoon paper to his mother, and sometimes to his sister too, in a raised voice, now there was not a sound. Well, perhaps this reading aloud, which his sister always told him and wrote him about, had lately fallen out of practice altogether. But all around, too, it was so quiet, although the apartment was surely not empty. "What a quiet life the family has been leading," Gregor said to himself, and as he stared rigidly ahead into the dark he felt a great pride that he had been able to provide such a life for his parents and his sister in such a nice apartment. But what if now all the peace, all the comfort, all the contentment were to come to a horrifying end? So as not to lose himself in such thoughts, Gregor preferred to start moving, and crawled up and down the room.

Once during the long evening one of the side doors was opened a crack, and once the other, and quickly shut again; someone had probably felt the need to come in, but had too many misgivings as well. Gregor now came to a halt right by the living-room door, determined somehow to bring the hesitant visitor in after all, or at least to find out who it was; but now the door was not opened again, and Gregor waited in vain. Early that morning, when the doors were locked, everyone had wanted to come in to him; now that he had opened one door and the others had evidently been opened during the day, no one came anymore, and the keys were now in the locks on the outside.

Not until late at night was the light in the living room put out, and now it was easy to establish that his parents and his sister had stayed awake all this time, for, as could be clearly heard, all three of them were now going away on tiptoe. Now surely no one would

come in to Gregor until morning; so he had a long time to consider undisturbed how he should rearrange his life now. But the high, open room, in which he was forced to lie flat on the floor, frightened him without his being able to discover why, for it was, after all, the room he had lived in for five years, and with a half-unconscious turn, and not without a slight feeling of shame, he scurried under the couch, where, although his back was squeezed a little and although he could no longer raise his head, he at once felt very comfortable and only regretted that his body was too wide to fit entirely under the couch.

There he stayed the whole night, which he spent partly in a half sleep from which hunger kept startling him awake, and partly in worries and vague hopes, all of which, however, led to the conclusion that for the time being he must keep calm and, through patience and the greatest consideration, make bearable for the family the unpleasantness that in his present condition he was, after all, forced to cause them.

Early the next morning, while it was still almost night, Gregor had the opportunity to test the strength of the resolutions he had just made, for his sister, almost fully dressed, opened the door from the front hall and looked in, tense with expectation. She did not find him at once, but when she noticed him under the couch—God, he had to be somewhere, he couldn't have flown away—she was so frightened that, unable to control herself, she slammed the door shut again from the outside. But as if she regretted her behavior, she immediately opened the door again and came in on tiptoe, as if she were visiting someone gravely ill, or even a stranger. Gregor had pushed his head forward to just the edge of the couch and was watching her. Would she notice that he had left the milk standing, and by no means for lack of hunger, and would she bring in some other food that suited him better? If she did not do it of her own accord, he would rather starve than call her

attention to it, even though he actually felt a tremendous urge to shoot out from under the couch, throw himself at his sister's feet, and beg her for something good to eat. But his sister noticed at once, with surprise, the bowl that was still full, with only a little milk spilled around it; she picked it up immediately, not with her bare hands, to be sure, but with a rag, and carried it out. Gregor was extremely curious to see what she would bring instead, and he imagined all sorts of things. But never could he have guessed what his sister, in her kindness, actually did. To test his taste, she brought him a whole selection, all spread out on an old newspaper. There were old, half-rotten vegetables; bones from the evening meal, coated with white sauce that had gone solid; a few raisins and almonds; a cheese that Gregor had declared inedible two days before; a piece of dry bread, a piece of bread spread with butter, and a piece of bread spread with butter and salted. In addition to all this she set down the bowl, probably now intended for Gregor once and for all, into which she had poured water. And out of delicacy, since she knew that Gregor would not eat in front of her, she left in great haste and even turned the key, just so that Gregor could see that he might make himself as comfortable as he liked. Gregor's little legs whirled as he now went at the food. His wounds, incidentally, must already have healed completely; he no longer felt any handicap; he was amazed at this, and thought of how more than a month ago he had cut his finger very slightly with a knife, and how that wound had still hurt him quite a bit only the day before yesterday. "Am I less sensitive now?" he thought, and was already sucking greedily at the cheese, which had attracted him at once and insistently, before any of the other foods. In quick succession, and with his eyes watering with satisfaction, he devoured the cheese, the vegetables, and the sauce; the fresh foods, on the other hand, did not taste good to him; he could not even stand their smell, and he dragged the things he wanted to

eat a little distance away. He had long since finished everything and was just lying lazily on the same spot when his sister slowly turned the key as a sign that he should withdraw. That startled him at once, even though he was almost dozing, and he hurried back under the couch. But it cost him great self-control to stay under the couch even for the short time his sister was in the room, for his body had swelled a little from the plentiful meal, and in that cramped space he could hardly breathe. Amid little fits of suffocation he watched with somewhat bulging eyes as his sister, unsuspecting, swept up with a broom not only the leftovers but even the foods Gregor had not touched at all, as if these too could no longer be used, and how she hastily dumped everything into a bucket, which she closed with a wooden lid, and then carried it all out. Hardly had she turned around when Gregor dragged himself out from under the couch and stretched and puffed himself out.

This was how Gregor was now given his food every day, once in the morning, while his parents and the maid were still asleep, and the second time after the family's midday dinner, for then his parents likewise slept for a little while, and the maid was sent out by his sister on some errand or other. Of course they did not want Gregor to starve either, but perhaps they could not have borne to know more about his eating than what they heard secondhand; perhaps, too, his sister wanted to spare them what might be only a small sorrow, for they really were suffering quite enough.

With what excuses the doctor and the locksmith had been got out of the apartment that first morning, Gregor could never find out, for since he could not be understood, it occurred to no one, not even his sister, that he could understand the others, and so, when his sister was in his room, he had to content himself with hearing only her sighs, now and then, and her appeals to the saints. Only later, when she had grown a little used to everything (there could never, of course, be any question of growing com-

pletely used to it), did Gregor sometimes catch a remark that was meant kindly or could be taken that way. "He liked it today," she would say when Gregor had made a good clearance of the food, whereas in the opposite case, which gradually became more and more frequent, she used to say almost sadly, "Everything's been left again."

But while Gregor could not learn any news directly, he overheard a good deal from the neighboring rooms, and as soon as he heard voices anywhere, he would run at once to the door in question and press his whole body against it. Especially in the early days, there was no conversation that was not somehow about him, if only secretly. For two days, at every meal, there were discussions about how they ought to behave now; but between meals, too, they talked about the same subject, for at least two members of the family were always at home, since probably no one wanted to stay home alone, and in no case could they leave the apartment entirely empty. Also, on the very first day, the maid (it was not quite clear what or how much she knew of what had happened) had begged his mother on her knees to dismiss her at once, and when she said good-bye a quarter of an hour later, she thanked them in tears for her dismissal, as if for the greatest kindness that had ever been done her in this house, and swore a terrible oath, without anyone asking her to, that she would not betray the slightest thing to anyone.

Now his sister had to do the cooking too, together with his mother; admittedly that was not much trouble, for they ate almost nothing. Again and again Gregor heard one of them urging another to eat, in vain, and getting no other answer than "Thank you, I've had enough," or something similar. Perhaps they did not drink anything either. His sister often asked his father whether he would like some beer, and warmly offered to fetch it herself, and when his father was silent, she said, to remove any qualms he might

have, that she could also send the caretaker for it, but then his father finally said a loud “No,” and nothing more was said about it.

In the course of that very first day, his father laid out the family’s entire financial situation and prospects to both his mother and his sister. Now and then he got up from the table and took some receipt or notebook out of his little Wertheim strongbox, which he had saved from the collapse of his business five years before. You could hear him unlock the complicated lock and, after taking out what he was looking for, lock it again. These explanations of his father’s were, in part, the first good news Gregor had heard since his captivity began. He had been of the opinion that his father had nothing whatever left over from that business; at least his father had never told him anything to the contrary, though Gregor, admittedly, had never asked him about it either. Gregor’s only concern at the time had been to do everything he could to make the family forget as quickly as possible the business disaster that had plunged them all into complete hopelessness. And so he had begun to work with a quite special ardor and had risen almost overnight from minor clerk to traveling salesman, a man who naturally had quite different opportunities for earning money, and whose successes at work were immediately turned, in the form of commission, into cash that could be laid on the table at home before the astonished and delighted family. Those had been fine times, and never afterward had they come again, at least not with that luster, even though Gregor later earned so much money that he was able to bear the expenses of the whole family, and did bear them. They had simply got used to it, both the family and Gregor; they accepted the money gratefully, he handed it over gladly, but no special warmth would come of it anymore. Only his sister had remained close to Gregor, and it was his secret plan that she, who unlike Gregor loved music very much and could play the violin movingly, should be sent to the conservatory next year,

regardless of the great expense this was bound to involve, which would be made up in some other way. Often during Gregor's short stays in town the conservatory was mentioned in his conversations with his sister, but always only as a beautiful dream whose realization was not to be thought of, and his parents did not like to hear even these innocent mentions; but Gregor was thinking of it very definitely and intended to announce it solemnly on Christmas Eve.

Such thoughts, completely useless in his present condition, went through his head while he clung upright to the door, listening. Sometimes out of general weariness he could not listen any more and let his head bump carelessly against the door, but immediately held it still again, for even the slight noise he had made by this had been heard in the next room and had silenced them all. "What's he up to now," his father would say after a while, obviously turned toward the door, and only then was the interrupted conversation gradually taken up again.

Gregor now learned well enough (for his father tended to repeat himself often in his explanations, partly because he himself had not dealt with these matters for a long time, partly also because his mother did not understand everything the first time) that in spite of all their misfortune a fortune, a very small one, it is true, was still left from the old days, which the untouched interest had meanwhile allowed to grow a little. Besides that, the money Gregor had brought home every month (he had kept only a few gulden for himself) had not been entirely used up and had accumulated into a small capital. Gregor, behind his door, nodded eagerly, delighted at this unexpected foresight and thrift. Actually, with this surplus money he could have paid off more of his father's debt to the boss, and the day on which he could have been rid of this job would have been much closer, but now it was undoubtedly better the way his father had arranged it.

Now, this money was not nearly enough to let the family live on the interest, say; it might be enough to keep the family for one year, or two at most, no more. So it was merely a sum that really should not be touched and had to be put aside for an emergency; the money to live on had to be earned. But his father, though healthy, was an old man who had not worked for five years and in any case could not expect too much of himself; in these five years, which were the first holiday of his laborious and yet unsuccessful life, he had put on a lot of fat and had become quite sluggish as a result. And was his old mother now supposed to earn money, she who suffered from asthma, for whom even a walk through the apartment was a strain, and who spent every other day on the sofa by the open window, struggling for breath? And was his sister to earn money, she who was still a child at seventeen, and who so deserved to keep the life she had led until now, which had consisted of dressing nicely, sleeping late, helping in the household, taking part in a few modest amusements, and above all playing the violin? Whenever the conversation turned to this necessity of earning money, Gregor would always be the first to let go of the door and throw himself onto the cool leather sofa beside it, for he was burning hot with shame and grief.

Often he lay there through the long nights, not sleeping a wink, only scratching at the leather for hours on end. Or he did not shrink from the great effort of pushing a chair over to the window, then crawling up the windowsill and, propped against the chair, leaning on the window, evidently only in some memory of the sense of freedom that looking out of the window used to give him. For in fact, from day to day, he saw things even a short distance away less and less clearly; the hospital across the street, the all too frequent sight of which he used to curse, he could no longer see at all, and if he had not known for certain that he lived on Charlottenstrasse, a quiet but thoroughly urban street, he might

have believed that he was looking out of his window into a wasteland where the gray sky and the gray earth merged indistinguishably. Only twice did his attentive sister have to see that the chair was standing by the window before, every time she had finished tidying the room, she pushed the chair back exactly to the window, and from then on she even left the inner casement open.

If only Gregor had been able to speak to his sister and thank her for everything she had to do for him, he would have borne her services more easily; as it was, he suffered from them. His sister, of course, tried to blur the awkwardness of it all as much as possible, and the more time went by, the better she naturally succeeded, but Gregor, too, saw through everything much more clearly as time went on. Even her coming in was terrible for him. Hardly had she come in when, without taking the time to close the door, however careful she otherwise was to spare everyone the sight of Gregor's room, she ran straight to the window and tore it open with hasty hands, as if she were almost suffocating, and stayed at the window for a little while, no matter how cold it was, breathing deeply. With this running and noise she frightened Gregor twice a day; the whole time he trembled under the couch, and yet he knew very well that she would certainly have gladly spared him this if only she had been able to stay in a room where Gregor was with the window closed.

Once, when a month or so had probably passed since Gregor's transformation and there was really no longer any particular reason for his sister to be astonished at Gregor's appearance, she came a little earlier than usual and found Gregor still looking out of the window, motionless and placed so as to give anyone a real fright. It would not have surprised Gregor if she had not come in, since his position prevented her from opening the window right away, but not only did she not come in, she even shrank back and shut the door; a stranger might have thought that Gregor had

been lying in wait for her and had meant to bite her. Gregor of course hid under the couch at once, but he had to wait until noon before his sister came back, and she seemed much more uneasy than usual. He realized from this that the sight of him was still unbearable to her and would have to go on being unbearable to her, and that she must have had to make a great effort not to run away at the sight of even the small part of his body that stuck out from under the couch. To spare her even this sight, one day he carried the bedsheet on his back onto the couch (the job took him four hours) and arranged it in such a way that he was now completely covered, and that his sister, even if she bent down, could not see him. If in her opinion this sheet had not been necessary, she could of course have removed it, for it was clear enough that it could not be Gregor's idea of pleasure to shut himself off so completely, but she left the sheet the way it was, and Gregor even thought he had caught a grateful look when he once carefully lifted the sheet a little with his head to see how his sister was taking the new arrangement.

During the first two weeks his parents could not bring themselves to come in to him, and he often heard them fully acknowledging his sister's present work, whereas until then they had often been annoyed with his sister because she had seemed to them a rather useless girl. But now both of them, his father and his mother, often waited outside Gregor's room while his sister was tidying it, and as soon as she came out she had to tell them in exact detail what the room looked like, what Gregor had eaten, how he had behaved this time, and whether perhaps some slight improvement could be noticed. His mother, for that matter, wanted to visit Gregor relatively soon, but his father and his sister at first held her back with sensible arguments, which Gregor listened to very attentively and fully approved of. Later, though, she had to be held back by force, and when she cried, "Let me go to

Gregor, he's my unhappy son! Don't you understand that I have to go to him?" Gregor thought that it might be good after all if his mother came in, not every day, of course, but perhaps once a week; she understood everything so much better than his sister, who, for all her courage, was still only a child and had perhaps, in the end, taken on such a difficult task only out of childish thoughtlessness.

Gregor's wish to see his mother was soon fulfilled. During the day, if only out of consideration for his parents, Gregor did not want to show himself at the window, but he could not crawl very much either on the few square yards of floor; he found it hard to bear lying still even during the night; eating soon no longer gave him the slightest pleasure; and so, for distraction, he took up the habit of crawling crisscross over the walls and ceiling. He especially liked hanging up there on the ceiling; it was quite different from lying on the floor; you breathed more freely; a gentle swaying went through your body; and in the almost happy absentmindedness Gregor fell into up there, it could happen that, to his own surprise, he let go and smacked down onto the floor. But now, of course, he had his body under quite different control than before and did not hurt himself even in so great a fall. His sister noticed at once the new amusement Gregor had found for himself (after all, he left traces of his sticky substance here and there as he crawled), and so she got it into her head to let Gregor crawl as widely as possible and to remove the furniture that prevented it, above all the wardrobe and the desk. But she was not able to do this by herself; she did not dare ask her father for help; the maid would certainly not have helped her, for this girl of about sixteen had indeed bravely held out since the former cook was dismissed, but had asked for the privilege of keeping the kitchen locked at all times and having to open it only when specially called; so his sister had no choice but to fetch her mother once when her father was out.

And his mother did come, with exclamations of excited joy, but fell silent at the door of Gregor's room. First, of course, his sister looked to see whether everything in the room was in order; only then did she let her mother come in. In the greatest haste Gregor had pulled the sheet lower still and into more folds; the whole thing really looked like nothing but a sheet thrown over the couch by chance. This time, too, Gregor refrained from spying out from under the sheet; he gave up seeing his mother this time and was simply glad that she had come after all. "Come on, you can't see him," said his sister, and she was evidently leading her mother by the hand. Gregor now heard the two frail women shifting the old wardrobe, which was heavy, after all, from its place, and heard his sister constantly claiming the greater part of the work for herself, without listening to the warnings of her mother, who was afraid she would overexert herself. It took a very long time. After about a quarter of an hour's work his mother said that they had better leave the wardrobe where it was, for in the first place it was too heavy, they would not be finished before his father came home, and with the wardrobe in the middle of the room they would block Gregor's every path, but in the second place it was not at all certain that removing the furniture would be doing Gregor a favor. To her it seemed the opposite was the case; the sight of the bare wall positively weighed on her heart; and why shouldn't Gregor have this feeling too, since he had long been used to the furniture in the room and would therefore feel abandoned in an empty one. "And isn't it then," his mother concluded very softly (in fact she was almost whispering the whole time, as if she wanted to keep Gregor, whose exact whereabouts she did not know, from hearing even the sound of her voice, for she was convinced that he did not understand the words), "and isn't it as if, by removing the furniture, we were showing that we're giving up all hope of improvement and leaving him to himself without any consideration? I think

it would be best to try to keep the room exactly the way it was before, so that when Gregor comes back to us he'll find everything unchanged and can forget the time in between all the more easily."

On hearing these words of his mother's, Gregor realized that the lack of any direct human conversation, combined with the monotonous life in the midst of the family, must have confused his mind in the course of these two months, for he could not explain otherwise how he could seriously have wanted his room to be emptied. Did he really want to have the warm room, comfortably furnished with inherited pieces, turned into a cave in which he would then, of course, be able to crawl around undisturbed in every direction, but at the price of forgetting, quickly and completely and at the same time, his human past? He was already close to forgetting now, and only his mother's voice, which he had not heard for so long, had shaken him awake. Nothing was to be removed; everything had to stay; he could not do without the good effects of the furniture on his condition; and if the furniture kept him from carrying on this senseless crawling around, that was no loss but a great advantage.

But his sister, unfortunately, was of a different opinion; she had grown used, not entirely without justification, to be sure, to acting as the special expert whenever Gregor's affairs were discussed with her parents, and so now too her mother's advice was reason enough for his sister to insist on the removal not only of the wardrobe and the desk, which was all she had thought of at first, but of all the furniture except the indispensable couch. Of course it was not only childish defiance and the self-confidence she had so unexpectedly and so painfully acquired of late that led her to this demand; she had in fact also observed that Gregor needed a lot of room to crawl, whereas, as far as anyone could see, he did not use the furniture in the least. But perhaps the romantic enthusiasm of girls her age also played a part, an enthusiasm that seeks

satisfaction at every opportunity and by which Grete now let herself be tempted into wanting to make Gregor's situation even more frightening, so that she could then do even more for him than before. For into a room where Gregor ruled the bare walls all alone, no one but Grete would ever dare to set foot.

And so she would not let her mother talk her out of her decision; her mother, too, seemed unsure of herself in this room out of sheer uneasiness, soon fell silent, and helped his sister as best she could to get the wardrobe out. Well, in an emergency Gregor could do without the wardrobe, but the desk at least had to stay. And hardly had the women left the room with the wardrobe, pressing against it and groaning, when Gregor thrust his head out from under the couch to see how he could intervene, carefully and as considerately as possible. But as bad luck would have it, it was his mother who came back first, while Grete in the next room had her arms around the wardrobe and was rocking it back and forth by herself, without, of course, budging it from the spot. His mother, however, was not used to the sight of Gregor; it might have made her ill; and so Gregor, alarmed, hurried backward to the far end of the couch, but could no longer prevent the sheet in front from moving a little. That was enough to catch his mother's attention. She stopped short, stood still for a moment, and then went back to Grete.

Although Gregor kept telling himself that nothing out of the ordinary was happening, that only a few pieces of furniture were being moved around, this coming and going of the women, their little calls to each other, the scraping of the furniture on the floor soon affected him, as he had to admit to himself, like a great commotion fed from every side, and however tightly he drew in his head and legs and pressed his body to the floor, he had to tell himself, inescapably, that he would not be able to stand it all for long. They were clearing out his room; taking from him everything he

loved; the wardrobe in which his fretsaw and other tools were kept they had already carried out; now they were loosening the desk, which had sunk firmly into the floor, the desk at which he had done his homework as a student at the commercial academy, as a pupil at middle school, and even back in grade school—and now he really had no more time to weigh the good intentions of the two women, whose existence, incidentally, he had almost forgotten, for they were so exhausted that they were already working in silence, and all you could hear was the heavy shuffle of their feet.

And so he broke out (the women were just leaning on the desk in the next room to catch their breath a little), changed the direction of his run four times, he really did not know what to rescue first, and then he saw, conspicuous on the wall, which was otherwise already bare, the picture of the lady dressed in nothing but furs, crawled hurriedly up to it, and pressed himself against the glass, which held him fast and felt good against his hot belly. This picture at least, which Gregor now covered completely, no one would take away now, surely. He twisted his head toward the living-room door to watch the women when they came back.

They had not allowed themselves much rest and were already coming back; Grete had put her arm around her mother and was almost carrying her. “So, what do we take now?” said Grete, and looked around. Then her eyes met Gregor’s on the wall. Probably only because her mother was there did she keep her composure; she bent her face toward her mother to keep her from looking around, and said, trembling, though, and without thinking: “Come on, hadn’t we better go back into the living room for a moment?” Grete’s intention was clear to Gregor: she wanted to get her mother to safety and then chase him down off the wall. Well, she could always try! He was sitting on his picture and would not give it up. He would rather leap at Grete’s face.

But Grete's words had only made her mother all the more uneasy; she stepped aside, caught sight of the enormous brown blotch on the flowered wallpaper, and before it really dawned on her that what she was seeing was Gregor, she cried in a screaming, raw voice, "Oh God, oh God!" and fell across the couch with her arms outspread, as if she were giving up everything, and did not move. "You, Gregor!" cried his sister, with a raised fist and a piercing look. These were the first words she had addressed directly to him since the transformation. She ran into the next room to fetch some kind of smelling salts with which she could rouse her mother from her faint; Gregor wanted to help too—there was still time to rescue the picture—but he was stuck fast to the glass and had to tear himself loose by force; then he too ran into the next room, as if he could give his sister some advice, as in the old days; but then he had to stand behind her doing nothing; while she was rummaging among various little bottles, he gave her another fright when she turned around; a bottle fell to the floor and broke; a splinter cut Gregor in the face; some corrosive medicine flowed around him; Grete, without lingering any longer, now took as many little bottles as she could hold and ran in with them to her mother; she kicked the door shut with her foot. Gregor was now cut off from his mother, who, through his fault, was perhaps near death; he must not open the door if he did not want to drive away his sister, who had to stay with his mother; there was nothing for him to do now but wait; and, beset by self-reproach and worry, he began to crawl, crawled over everything, walls, furniture, and ceiling, and finally, in his despair, as the whole room was beginning to spin around him, fell down onto the middle of the big table.

A short while passed; Gregor lay there limply; all around it was quiet; perhaps that was a good sign. Then the doorbell rang. The girl, of course, was locked in her kitchen, and so Grete had to go and open the door. His father had come home. "What's happened?"

were his first words; Grete's appearance must have told him everything. Grete answered in a muffled voice; evidently she was pressing her face against her father's chest: "Mother fainted, but she's better now. Gregor broke out." "I knew it," said his father, "I always told you so, but you women never want to listen." It was clear to Gregor that his father had misinterpreted Grete's all too brief report and assumed that Gregor had been guilty of some act of violence. Therefore Gregor now had to try to calm his father down, for he had neither the time nor the means to explain things to him. And so he fled to the door of his room and pressed himself against it, so that his father, as he came in from the front hall, could see at once that Gregor had every intention of returning to his room immediately and that there was no need to drive him back, that they had only to open the door and he would disappear at once.

But his father was in no mood to notice such subtleties. "Ah!" he cried as soon as he came in, in a tone as if he were furious and glad at the same time. Gregor drew his head back from the door and raised it toward his father. He really had not imagined his father the way he was standing there now; admittedly, he had lately been so absorbed in his new sport of crawling around that he had neglected to concern himself as before with what went on in the rest of the apartment, and he really should have been prepared to find things changed. Even so, even so, was this still his father? The same man who used to lie wearily buried in bed when Gregor set out on a business trip; who, on the evenings when Gregor came home, had received him in his dressing gown in the armchair; who was not really capable of getting up but had only raised his arms as a sign of joy; and who, on the rare walks they took together on a few Sundays a year and on the most important holidays, between Gregor and his mother, who were slow walkers themselves, would toil along still a little more slowly, bundled up in

his old overcoat, always carefully planting his crook-handled cane, and who, whenever he wanted to say something, almost always stood still and gathered his companions around him? But now he was holding himself very erect, dressed in a tight-fitting blue uniform with gold buttons, the kind worn by attendants at banking houses; his strong double chin spread out over the high, stiff collar of the jacket; from under his bushy eyebrows his black eyes looked out alert and attentive; his white hair, usually disheveled, was combed down flat into a painfully exact, gleaming part. He threw his cap, which bore a gold monogram, probably that of a bank, in an arc right across the room onto the couch, and with the tails of his long uniform jacket thrown back, his hands in his trouser pockets, he walked toward Gregor with a grim face. He probably did not know himself what he meant to do; in any case he lifted his feet unusually high, and Gregor was amazed at the gigantic size of the soles of his boots. But he did not dwell on this; he had known ever since the first day of his new life that his father considered only the greatest severity appropriate in dealing with him. And so he ran ahead of his father, stopped when his father stood still, and hurried forward again as soon as his father so much as moved. In this way they went around the room several times without anything decisive happening; indeed, because of its slow pace the whole thing did not even look like a pursuit. That was why Gregor stayed on the floor for the time being, especially since he was afraid his father might regard a flight onto the walls or the ceiling as particular malice. Still, Gregor had to admit to himself that he would not be able to keep up even this running for long, for while his father took one step, he had to carry out countless movements. He was already beginning to be short of breath, just as even in his earlier days he had not had entirely reliable lungs. As he staggered along like this, scarcely keeping his eyes open, so as to gather all his strength for running; in his dullness not even thinking of any

other way of escape than running; and having almost forgotten that the walls were free to him, though here they were obstructed by carefully carved furniture full of sharp points and prongs—something, lightly flung, flew down right beside him and rolled along in front of him. It was an apple; a second one followed immediately; Gregor stopped short in terror; running any farther was useless, for his father had resolved to bombard him. He had filled his pockets from the fruit bowl on the sideboard and was now throwing apple after apple, not aiming very carefully for now. These little red apples rolled around on the floor as if electrified and knocked into one another. A weakly thrown apple grazed Gregor's back but slid off harmlessly. One that came flying right after it, however, actually lodged itself in Gregor's back; Gregor wanted to drag himself onward, as if the startling, unbelievable pain might pass if he changed his place; but he felt as if he were nailed to the spot and sprawled out, all his senses in utter confusion. Only with his last glance did he still see the door of his room being flung open, and his mother rushing out ahead of his screaming sister, in her chemise, for his sister had undressed her to let her breathe more freely in her faint; saw his mother then running toward his father, and her loosened petticoats sliding to the floor one after another on the way, and how, stumbling over the petticoats, she threw herself upon his father and, embracing him, in complete union with him—but now Gregor's sight was already failing—with her hands clasped around the back of his father's head, begged him to spare Gregor's life.

Part III

Gregor's serious wound, from which he suffered for over a month (the apple remained embedded in his flesh as a visible memento, since no one dared to remove it), seemed to have reminded even his father that Gregor, in spite of his present sad and repulsive shape, was a member of the family, who must not be treated like an enemy, but toward whom family duty commanded one to swallow one's disgust and endure, nothing but endure.

And even though, because of his wound, Gregor had now lost much of his mobility, probably for good, and for the time being needed long, long minutes to cross his room, like an old invalid (crawling about up high was out of the question), he was given what was in his opinion completely sufficient compensation for this worsening of his condition, in that every evening toward dusk the living-room door, which he had taken to watching closely for an hour or two beforehand, was opened, so that, lying in the darkness of his room, invisible from the living room, he could see the whole family at the lamplit table and listen to their talk, with everyone's permission, so to speak, and thus quite differently from before.

Of course these were no longer the lively conversations of former times, which Gregor had always thought of with a certain longing in the small hotel rooms when he had had to throw himself, exhausted, into the damp bedding. Now things were mostly very quiet. Soon after supper his father would fall asleep in his chair; his mother and sister would urge each other to be quiet; his mother, bent far forward under the light, sewed fine lingerie for a

fashion shop; his sister, who had taken a job as a salesgirl, studied shorthand and French in the evenings, so as perhaps to get a better position someday. Sometimes his father woke up, and as if he had no idea that he had been asleep, said to Gregor's mother, "How long you've been sewing again today!" and went right back to sleep, while mother and sister smiled wearily at each other.

With a kind of obstinacy his father refused to take off his attendant's uniform even at home; and while his dressing gown hung uselessly on the coat hook, his father dozed fully dressed in his place, as if he were always ready for duty and were waiting even here for the voice of his superior. As a result the uniform, which had not been new to begin with, grew less and less clean in spite of all the care his mother and sister took, and Gregor often spent whole evenings looking at this garment, stained all over, gleaming with its constantly polished gold buttons, in which the old man slept, most uncomfortably and yet peacefully.

As soon as the clock struck ten, his mother would try to wake his father by speaking softly to him and then persuade him to go to bed, for the sleep he got here was no proper sleep, and his father, who had to report for duty at six, badly needed proper sleep. But with the obstinacy that had seized him ever since he had become an attendant, he always insisted on staying at the table longer, even though he regularly fell asleep, and besides, it then took the greatest effort to get him to exchange the chair for his bed. However much his mother and sister pressed him with little admonitions, he would slowly shake his head for a quarter of an hour at a time, keeping his eyes closed, and would not get up. His mother plucked at his father's sleeve and whispered endearments into his ear, his sister left her homework to help her mother, but none of it worked on his father. He only sank deeper into his chair. Only when the women took him under the arms did he open his eyes, look by turns at mother and sister, and say, as he usually did,

“What a life. So this is the peace of my old age.” And leaning on the two women, he would get up, laboriously, as if he were the greatest burden to himself, let the women lead him to the door, wave them away there, and go on by himself, while his mother hastily threw down her sewing and his sister her pen, so as to run after his father and go on helping him.

Who in this overworked and overtired family had time to look after Gregor more than was absolutely necessary? The household was cut back more and more; the maid was let go after all; a huge, bony cleaning woman with white hair fluttering around her head came mornings and evenings to do the heaviest work; everything else his mother took care of, on top of all her sewing. It even happened that various pieces of family jewelry, which his mother and sister had once worn so happily at parties and celebrations, were sold, as Gregor learned in the evening from the general discussion of the prices they had fetched. But the greatest lament was always that they could not leave this apartment, which was far too large for their present circumstances, since it was impossible to imagine how Gregor could be moved. But Gregor saw well enough that it was not only consideration for him that stood in the way of a move, for he could easily have been transported in a suitable crate with a few air holes; what mainly kept the family from moving was rather their complete hopelessness and the thought that they had been struck by a misfortune such as had struck no one else in their whole circle of relatives and acquaintances. What the world demands of poor people they did to the utmost: his father fetched breakfast for the junior bank clerks, his mother sacrificed herself for the underwear of strangers, his sister ran back and forth behind the counter at the customers' command, but the family's strength went no further than that. And the wound in Gregor's back began to hurt as if it were new when his mother and sister, having put his father to bed, now came back, let their work lie,

moved close together, and sat cheek to cheek; when his mother, pointing to Gregor's room, now said, "Shut that door, Grete," and when Gregor was in the dark again, while next door the women mingled their tears or even stared at the table, dry-eyed.

Gregor spent the nights and days almost entirely without sleep. Sometimes he thought that the next time the door opened he would take the family's affairs in hand again just as before; in his thoughts there appeared again, after a long time, the boss and the chief clerk, the clerks and the apprentices, the porter who was so slow on the uptake, two or three friends from other firms, a chambermaid from a hotel in the provinces, a dear, fleeting memory, a cashier from a hat shop whom he had courted seriously but too slowly; they all appeared, mixed in with strangers or people he had already forgotten, but instead of helping him and his family, they were all inaccessible, and he was glad when they vanished. But then again he was in no mood at all to worry about his family; he was filled with nothing but rage at how badly he was cared for, and although he could not imagine anything he might have had an appetite for, he made plans for getting into the pantry to take what was his due, even if he was not hungry. No longer considering what might especially please Gregor, his sister, before she ran off to work in the morning and at noon, would hastily push some food or other into Gregor's room with her foot, only to sweep it out in the evening with a swish of the broom, indifferent to whether it had perhaps only been tasted or (most often the case) had been left completely untouched. The tidying of the room, which she now always did in the evenings, could not have been done any faster. Streaks of dirt ran along the walls; here and there lay balls of dust and filth. At first, when his sister arrived, Gregor would station himself in the most telltale of these corners, so as to reproach her, in a way, by where he stood. But he could probably have stayed there for weeks without his sister mending her ways;

she saw the dirt just as well as he did, but she had simply decided to leave it. At the same time, with a touchiness that was quite new in her and had in fact seized the whole family, she watched over her right to be the only one to tidy Gregor's room. Once his mother had given Gregor's room a thorough cleaning, which she had managed only after using several buckets of water (all that dampness, admittedly, upset Gregor too, and he lay spread out on the couch, embittered and motionless), but his mother did not escape punishment. For hardly had his sister noticed the change in Gregor's room that evening when, deeply offended, she ran into the living room and, in spite of her mother's imploringly raised hands, broke into a fit of weeping, which her parents (his father had, of course, been startled out of his chair) at first watched in astonishment and helplessness; until they too began to stir; his father turning to his right to reproach Gregor's mother for not leaving the cleaning of Gregor's room to Grete, and to his left, by contrast, to shout at Grete that she would never be allowed to clean Gregor's room again; while his mother tried to drag his father, who was beside himself with agitation, into the bedroom; his sister, shaken with sobs, pounded the table with her little fists; and Gregor hissed loudly with rage because it occurred to no one to shut the door and spare him this sight and this noise.

But even if his sister, exhausted from her job, had grown tired of looking after Gregor as before, there was still no need at all for his mother to take her place, and Gregor need not have been neglected. For now there was the cleaning woman. This old widow, who with the help of her strong frame had probably survived the worst in her long life, felt no real revulsion toward Gregor. Without being in any way curious, she had once happened to open the door of Gregor's room and, at the sight of Gregor, who, taken completely by surprise, began to run back and forth even though no one was chasing him, she had stopped short in amazement, her

hands folded over her stomach. Since then she never failed, morning and evening, to open the door a little, briefly, and look in at Gregor. At first she also called him over to her, with words she probably thought were friendly, such as “Come over here, you old dung beetle!” or “Look at the old dung beetle!” To such overtures Gregor made no reply, but stayed motionless where he was, as if the door had not been opened at all. If only they had ordered this cleaning woman to clean his room every day, instead of letting her disturb him uselessly whenever she felt like it! Once, early in the morning—a heavy rain, perhaps already a sign of the coming spring, was beating against the panes—when the cleaning woman began again with her usual remarks, Gregor was so exasperated that he turned toward her as if to attack, slowly and feebly, to be sure. But the cleaning woman, instead of being afraid, simply lifted high in the air a chair that stood near the door, and as she stood there with her mouth wide open, it was clear that she intended to close her mouth only when the chair in her hand came crashing down on Gregor’s back. “Is that as far as you go?” she asked when Gregor turned around again, and calmly put the chair back in the corner.

Gregor now ate almost nothing at all. Only when he happened to pass the food set out for him would he take a bite into his mouth, as a game, hold it there for hours, and then mostly spit it out again. At first he thought it was grief over the state of his room that kept him from eating, but it was precisely with the changes in his room that he very soon made his peace. The family had got into the habit of putting things into this room that they could not find room for anywhere else, and there were many such things now, since one room of the apartment had been rented to three boarders. These serious gentlemen (all three had full beards, as Gregor once established through a crack in the door) were painfully intent on order, not only in their own room but, since

they had now taken lodgings here, in the entire household, and therefore especially in the kitchen. Useless or, worse, dirty junk they could not stand. Besides, they had brought most of their own furnishings with them. For this reason many things had become superfluous which, though they could not be sold, the family did not want to throw away either. All these wandered into Gregor's room. So did the ash bin and the garbage bin from the kitchen. Anything that happened to be of no use at the moment, the cleaning woman, who was always in a great hurry, simply flung into Gregor's room; fortunately Gregor usually saw only the object in question and the hand that held it. The cleaning woman perhaps intended to come and get the things again when she had the time and the chance, or to throw them all out at once, but in fact they stayed wherever they had landed when first thrown, unless Gregor wound his way through the junk and set it moving, at first because he had to, since there was no other place free to crawl, but later with growing pleasure, although after such wanderings, tired to death and sad, he would again not stir for hours.

Since the boarders sometimes also had their supper at home in the common living room, the living-room door stayed shut on some evenings, but Gregor did without the open door quite easily; after all, on many evenings when it was open he had not made use of it, but had lain, without the family noticing, in the darkest corner of his room. Once, though, the cleaning woman had left the door to the living room slightly open, and it stayed open even when the boarders came in in the evening and the light was turned on. They sat down at the head of the table, where in former times his father, his mother, and Gregor had sat, unfolded their napkins, and took knife and fork in hand. At once his mother appeared in the doorway with a platter of meat, and right behind her his sister with a platter piled high with potatoes. The food gave off a thick steam. The boarders bent over the platters set

before them as if they wanted to inspect them before eating, and in fact the one who sat in the middle, and who seemed to count as an authority for the other two, cut up a piece of meat while it was still on the platter, evidently to determine whether it was tender enough and whether it ought perhaps to be sent back to the kitchen. He was satisfied, and mother and sister, who had been watching anxiously, breathed a sigh of relief and began to smile.

The family themselves ate in the kitchen. Nevertheless, before going into the kitchen, his father came into this room and, with a single bow, cap in hand, made a circuit of the table. The boarders all rose and murmured something into their beards. When they were alone again, they ate in almost complete silence. It seemed strange to Gregor that out of all the various noises of eating he could keep picking out the sound of their chewing teeth, as if Gregor were to be shown by this that you needed teeth to eat, and that even with the finest toothless jaws you could do nothing. "I do have an appetite," Gregor told himself anxiously, "but not for these things. How these boarders stuff themselves, and I'm perishing!"

That very evening—Gregor could not remember having heard the violin during all this time—its sound came from the kitchen. The boarders had already finished their supper; the one in the middle had pulled out a newspaper and given the other two a page each, and now they were leaning back, reading and smoking. When the violin began to play, they became attentive, got up, and went on tiptoe to the door of the front hall, where they stood pressed close together. They must have been heard from the kitchen, for his father called out, "Is the playing perhaps disagreeable to you, gentlemen? It can be stopped at once." "On the contrary," said the middle gentleman, "wouldn't the young lady like to come in and join us and play here in the room, where it is so much more comfortable and cozy?" "Oh, by all means," cried his father, as if he were the violinist. The gentlemen stepped back into the

room and waited. Soon his father came in with the music stand, his mother with the music, and his sister with the violin. His sister calmly got everything ready for playing; his parents, who had never rented out rooms before and therefore overdid their politeness toward the boarders, did not even dare to sit down on their own chairs; his father leaned against the door, his right hand tucked between two buttons of his livery jacket, which he had buttoned up; his mother, though, was offered a chair by one of the gentlemen and, since she left the chair where the gentleman had happened to put it, sat off to one side in a corner.

His sister began to play; father and mother, each from their own side, followed the movements of her hands attentively. Gregor, drawn by the playing, had ventured a little farther forward and already had his head in the living room. He hardly wondered at how little consideration he had shown for the others lately; this consideration had once been his pride. And yet just now he would have had more reason than ever to hide, for because of the dust that lay everywhere in his room and flew up at the slightest movement, he too was covered with dust; threads, hairs, and scraps of food he dragged around with him on his back and sides; his indifference to everything was much too great for him to lie down on his back and rub himself against the carpet, as he had once done several times a day. And in spite of this condition, he felt no shyness about advancing a little way across the spotless floor of the living room.

Admittedly, no one was paying any attention to him either. The family was completely absorbed in the violin playing; the boarders, on the other hand, who at first, their hands in their trouser pockets, had stationed themselves much too close behind his sister's music stand, so that they could all have read the music, which must surely have bothered his sister, soon withdrew to the window with lowered heads, talking in undertones, and stayed there,

anxiously watched by his father. It now really looked all too plainly as if they had been disappointed in their expectation of hearing some beautiful or entertaining violin playing, as if they had had enough of the whole performance and were letting their peace be disturbed only out of politeness. In particular, the way they all blew the smoke of their cigars up into the air through their noses and mouths suggested great nervousness. And yet his sister was playing so beautifully. Her face was tilted to one side; her eyes followed the lines of music, searching and sad. Gregor crawled forward a little farther and held his head close to the floor, so as possibly to meet her eyes. Was he an animal, that music moved him so? He felt as if the way were opening before him to the unknown nourishment he longed for. He was determined to push his way forward to his sister, to tug at her skirt and so let her know that she should come into his room with her violin, for no one here appreciated her playing the way he would appreciate it. He would never let her out of his room again, at least not as long as he lived; for the first time his frightful shape would be of use to him; he would be at every door of his room at once and hiss at the attackers; his sister, though, should stay with him not by force but of her own free will; she should sit beside him on the couch and bend her ear down to him, and then he would confide to her that he had firmly intended to send her to the conservatory, and that, if this misfortune had not intervened, he would have told everyone so last Christmas—Christmas had surely come and gone by now?—without paying any attention to any objections. After this declaration his sister would burst into tears of emotion, and Gregor would raise himself up to her shoulder and kiss her neck, which, since she had started going to work, she wore bare, without a ribbon or collar.

“Mr. Samsa!” the middle gentleman called out to his father, and without wasting another word pointed his index finger at Gregor,

who was slowly moving forward. The violin fell silent; the middle boarder first smiled at his friends, shaking his head, and then looked at Gregor again. His father seemed to think it more urgent to calm the boarders first, instead of driving Gregor away, even though they were not upset at all, and Gregor seemed to entertain them more than the violin playing had. He hurried over to them and, with arms outspread, tried to push them into their room and at the same time to block their view of Gregor with his body. Now they really did get a little angry, though you could no longer tell whether it was at his father's behavior or at the realization, now dawning on them, that without knowing it they had had a neighbor like Gregor. They demanded explanations from his father, raised their arms in their turn, plucked nervously at their beards, and only slowly backed away toward their room. Meanwhile his sister had overcome the daze into which she had fallen when her playing was so suddenly broken off; after holding the violin and bow for a while in her limply hanging hands and going on looking at the music as if she were still playing, she had pulled herself together all at once, laid the instrument in the lap of her mother, who was still sitting in her chair, short of breath, her lungs laboring violently, and had run into the next room, which the boarders, pressed by her father, were now approaching more quickly. You could see the blankets and pillows on the beds flying up under his sister's practiced hands and falling into order. Even before the gentlemen had reached the room, she had finished making the beds and slipped out. His father again seemed so gripped by his obstinacy that he forgot all the respect he did, after all, owe his tenants. He just kept pushing and pushing, until, right in the doorway of the room, the middle gentleman stamped his foot thunderously and so brought his father to a halt. "I hereby declare," he said, raising his hand and looking around for the mother and sister too, "that in view of the disgusting conditions prevailing in this

apartment and this family”—here he spat on the floor, curtly and decisively—“I am giving notice on my room immediately. Naturally I shall not pay the slightest thing for the days I have lived here, either; on the contrary, I shall consider whether I may not bring some claims against you, which, believe me, will be very easy to justify.” He stopped and looked straight ahead, as if he were expecting something. And in fact his two friends promptly chimed in with the words: “We too are giving notice immediately.” Thereupon he seized the door handle and shut the door with a bang.

His father tottered, groping with his hands, to his chair and let himself fall into it; it looked as if he were stretching out for his usual evening nap, but the heavy nodding of his head, which seemed to have lost all support, showed that he was not asleep at all. Gregor had been lying still all this time on the spot where the boarders had caught him. Disappointment at the failure of his plan, but perhaps also the weakness brought on by so much hunger, made it impossible for him to move. He feared, with a certain definiteness, that the very next moment everything would come crashing down on him at once, and he waited. He was not even startled by the violin, which slipped from under his mother’s trembling fingers, fell from her lap, and gave out a reverberating note.

“My dear parents,” said his sister, striking the table with her hand by way of introduction, “things can’t go on like this. Maybe you don’t realize it, but I do. I won’t pronounce my brother’s name in front of this monster, and so all I’ll say is: we have to try to get rid of it. We’ve done everything humanly possible to take care of it and put up with it; I don’t think anyone can reproach us in the least.”

“She’s right a thousand times over,” said his father to himself. His mother, who still could not get enough breath, began to cough

hollowly into her hand, which she held in front of her mouth, with a crazed look in her eyes.

His sister hurried to her mother and held her forehead. His sister's words seemed to have led his father to more definite thoughts; he had sat up straight and was playing with his attendant's cap among the plates still standing on the table from the boarders' supper, and now and then he looked over at Gregor, who lay still.

"We have to try to get rid of it," his sister now said, addressing only his father, for his mother, coughing, heard nothing. "It's going to kill you both, I can see it coming. When people have to work as hard as we all do, they can't put up with this endless torment at home as well. I can't stand it anymore either." And she broke into such violent weeping that her tears ran down onto her mother's face, from which she wiped them with mechanical movements of her hand.

"Child," said his father with sympathy and with striking understanding, "but what are we to do?"

His sister only shrugged her shoulders as a sign of the helplessness that had now, while she wept, come over her, in contrast to her earlier certainty.

"If he understood us," said his father, half asking; his sister, in the midst of her weeping, shook her hand vehemently as a sign that this was out of the question.

"If he understood us," his father repeated, and by closing his eyes took in his sister's conviction that this was impossible, "then perhaps we could come to some arrangement with him. But as it is —"

"It has to go," cried his sister, "that's the only way, Father. You just have to try to get rid of the idea that it's Gregor. Our real misfortune is that we believed it for so long. But how can it be Gregor? If it were Gregor, he would have realized long ago that it

isn't possible for human beings to live with such an animal, and he would have gone away of his own accord. Then we wouldn't have a brother, but we could go on living and honor his memory. But as it is, this animal persecutes us, drives away the boarders, obviously wants to take over the whole apartment and make us spend the night in the street. Just look, Father," she suddenly screamed, "he's starting again!" And in a terror quite incomprehensible to Gregor, his sister even abandoned her mother, positively pushed herself off from her chair, as if she would rather sacrifice her mother than stay near Gregor, and hurried behind her father, who, upset merely by her behavior, stood up too and half raised his arms in front of her, as if to protect her.

But it did not even occur to Gregor to want to frighten anyone, least of all his sister. He had only begun to turn around in order to make his way back into his room, and that, admittedly, did look striking, since in his ailing condition he had to help himself with his head in making the difficult turns, lifting it many times and knocking it against the floor. He paused and looked around. His good intention seemed to have been recognized; it had only been a momentary fright. Now they all looked at him, silent and sad. His mother lay in her chair, her legs stretched out and pressed together, her eyes almost closing from exhaustion; his father and his sister sat side by side; his sister had put her hand around her father's neck.

"Now perhaps I may turn around," thought Gregor, and began his labor again. He could not suppress his panting from the effort and had to rest now and then as well. Otherwise no one was rushing him; it was all left to him. When he had completed the turn, he immediately began to make his way straight back. He was amazed at the great distance that separated him from his room, and could not understand at all how, weak as he was, he had covered the same distance a short while before almost without noticing. Intent

only on crawling fast, he hardly noticed that no word, no exclamation from his family disturbed him. Only when he was already in the doorway did he turn his head, not all the way, for he felt his neck growing stiff; still, he saw that nothing behind him had changed, except that his sister had stood up. His last glance brushed his mother, who was now fast asleep.

Hardly was he inside his room when the door was hastily pushed shut, bolted, and locked. Gregor was so startled by the sudden noise behind him that his little legs gave way under him. It was his sister who had been in such a hurry. She had already been standing there upright, waiting; then she had sprung forward, light on her feet; Gregor had not heard her coming at all; and she cried "At last!" to her parents as she turned the key in the lock.

"And now?" Gregor asked himself, and looked around in the dark. He soon discovered that he could no longer move at all. He was not surprised at this; rather, it seemed unnatural to him that he had actually been able until now to get around on these thin little legs. Otherwise he felt relatively comfortable. True, he had pains all over his body, but it seemed to him that they were gradually growing fainter and fainter and would finally go away altogether. The rotten apple in his back and the inflamed area around it, which was entirely covered with soft dust, he hardly felt anymore. He thought back on his family with tenderness and love. His conviction that he would have to disappear was, if possible, even firmer than his sister's. He remained in this state of empty and peaceful reflection until the tower clock struck three in the morning. He still lived to see the first glimmer of the general brightening outside the window. Then, without his willing it, his head sank all the way down, and from his nostrils his last breath streamed faintly out.

When the cleaning woman came early in the morning (out of sheer strength and haste she slammed all the doors, no matter

how often she had been asked not to, so hard that once she had arrived there was no more quiet sleep anywhere in the apartment), she at first found nothing unusual on her customary brief visit to Gregor. She thought he was lying there so motionless on purpose, playing the injured party; she credited him with every conceivable kind of intelligence. Since she happened to be holding the long broom, she tried to tickle Gregor with it from the doorway. When that had no effect either, she grew annoyed and poked Gregor a little, and only when she had shoved him from his place without meeting any resistance did she take notice. When she soon realized the true state of affairs, her eyes grew wide and she whistled to herself, but she did not linger; she tore open the door of the bedroom and called loudly into the darkness: "Come and have a look, it's croaked; there it lies, croaked for good and all!"

Mr. and Mrs. Samsa sat up in their marriage bed and had their hands full getting over the fright the cleaning woman had given them before they managed to take in what she was reporting. But then Mr. and Mrs. Samsa, each on their own side, climbed hastily out of bed; Mr. Samsa threw the blanket over his shoulders, Mrs. Samsa came out in nothing but her nightgown; and that was how they stepped into Gregor's room. Meanwhile the door of the living room had opened too, where Grete had been sleeping since the boarders moved in; she was fully dressed, as if she had not slept at all, and her pale face seemed to prove it as well. "Dead?" said Mrs. Samsa, and looked up questioningly at the cleaning woman, although she could have examined everything herself, and could even have seen it without examining. "I should say so," said the cleaning woman, and to prove it she pushed Gregor's corpse a good way farther to one side with the broom. Mrs. Samsa made a movement as if she meant to hold back the broom, but did not do it. "Well," said Mr. Samsa, "now we can thank God." He crossed himself, and the three women followed his example. Grete, who

did not take her eyes off the corpse, said, "Just look how thin he was. Well, he hadn't eaten anything for such a long time. The food came out again just the way it went in." And in fact Gregor's body was completely flat and dry; you could really see it only now, when it was no longer raised up on its little legs and nothing else distracted the eye.

"Come in with us for a little while, Grete," said Mrs. Samsa with a melancholy smile, and Grete, not without looking back at the corpse, followed her parents into the bedroom. The cleaning woman shut the door and opened the window wide. Although it was early in the morning, there was already a touch of mildness mixed in with the fresh air. It was, after all, already the end of March.

The three boarders came out of their room and looked around in astonishment for their breakfast; they had been forgotten. "Where is breakfast?" the middle gentleman asked the cleaning woman sullenly. She, however, put her finger to her lips and then hastily and silently beckoned to the gentlemen to come into Gregor's room. They did come, and then stood around Gregor's corpse, their hands in the pockets of their somewhat shabby little jackets, in the room, which was now quite light.

Then the bedroom door opened, and Mr. Samsa appeared in his livery, his wife on one arm, his daughter on the other. They all looked as if they had been crying a little; now and then Grete pressed her face against her father's arm.

"Leave my apartment at once!" said Mr. Samsa, and pointed to the door without letting go of the women. "What do you mean?" said the middle gentleman, somewhat taken aback, and smiled sugarily. The two others held their hands behind their backs and kept rubbing them together, as if in gleeful anticipation of a big quarrel that was bound to turn out in their favor. "I mean exactly what I say," answered Mr. Samsa, and, with his two companions,

the three of them in a line, advanced on the boarder. The boarder at first stood still and looked at the floor, as if the things in his head were arranging themselves in a new order. "Then we'll go," he said, and looked up at Mr. Samsa as if, in a humility that had suddenly come over him, he needed fresh permission even for this decision. Mr. Samsa merely nodded at him briefly several times, his eyes wide. Thereupon the gentleman did in fact go at once, with long strides, into the front hall; his two friends had been listening for a little while now, their hands quite still, and now they positively skipped after him, as if afraid that Mr. Samsa might get into the front hall ahead of them and cut them off from their leader. In the front hall all three took their hats from the rack, drew their walking sticks from the umbrella stand, bowed silently, and left the apartment. With a mistrust that turned out to be completely unfounded, Mr. Samsa stepped out onto the landing with the two women; leaning on the railing, they watched the three gentlemen going down the long stairs, slowly, it is true, but steadily, disappearing on each floor at a certain turn of the stairwell and coming out again after a few moments; the lower they got, the more the Samsa family lost interest in them, and when a butcher's boy, carrying his tray on his head with a proud bearing, came climbing up toward the gentlemen and then on past them, high above, Mr. Samsa and the women soon left the railing, and they all went back into their apartment, as if relieved.

They decided to spend this day resting and going for a walk; they had not only earned this break from work, they absolutely needed it. And so they sat down at the table and wrote three letters of excuse, Mr. Samsa to the management of his bank, Mrs. Samsa to her employer, and Grete to the proprietor of her shop. While they were writing, the cleaning woman came in to say that she was leaving, for her morning work was done. At first the three letter writers merely nodded without looking up; only when the

cleaning woman still would not go away did they look up in annoyance. "Well?" asked Mr. Samsa. The cleaning woman stood smiling in the doorway, as if she had some great piece of good luck to announce to the family but would do so only if she were questioned thoroughly. The little ostrich feather standing almost upright on her hat, which had annoyed Mr. Samsa the whole time she had worked for them, swayed lightly in every direction. "So what is it you actually want?" asked Mrs. Samsa, whom the cleaning woman respected more than anyone else. "Well," answered the cleaning woman, and could not go on right away for friendly laughter, "you needn't worry about how to get rid of that stuff next door. It's all taken care of." Mrs. Samsa and Grete bent down over their letters as if they meant to go on writing; Mr. Samsa, who noticed that the cleaning woman was now about to start describing everything in detail, fended this off firmly with an outstretched hand. Since she was not allowed to tell her story, she remembered the great hurry she was in and, obviously offended, called out, "Bye-bye, everybody," whirled around, and left the apartment with a terrible slamming of doors.

"She'll be dismissed this evening," said Mr. Samsa, but got no answer from either his wife or his daughter, for the cleaning woman seemed to have disturbed the peace they had only just gained. They got up, went to the window, and stayed there, holding each other close. Mr. Samsa turned around in his chair toward them and watched them quietly for a little while. Then he called out, "Come on over here, then. Leave the old business alone, once and for all. And show me a little consideration too." The women obeyed him at once, hurried over to him, caressed him, and quickly finished their letters.

Then all three of them left the apartment together, which they had not done for months, and took the streetcar out into the open country beyond the city. The car, in which they were the only pas-

sengers, was flooded with warm sunshine. Leaning back comfortably in their seats, they discussed their prospects for the future, and it turned out that on closer inspection these were not bad at all, for all three of their jobs, which they had never really asked one another about, were extremely favorable and especially promising for later on. The greatest immediate improvement in their situation would of course come easily from moving; they now wanted to take a smaller and cheaper apartment, but one better located and altogether more practical than their present one, which Gregor had picked out. While they were talking in this way, it occurred to Mr. and Mrs. Samsa, almost at the same moment, as they watched their daughter growing livelier and livelier, how, in spite of all the caretaking that had left her cheeks pale, she had lately blossomed into a beautiful, voluptuous girl. Growing quieter, and communicating almost unconsciously through glances, they thought that it would soon be time to find her a good husband too. And it seemed to them a confirmation of their new dreams and good intentions when, at the end of their ride, their daughter got up first and stretched her young body.

Colophon

The Metamorphosis

Original title · *Die Verwandlung*

Author · Franz Kafka (1883–1924)

Translator · Ether Library

First publication · October 1915, in the monthly *Die weißen Blätter*; in book form late in 1915 by Kurt Wolff Verlag, Leipzig, in the series *Der jüngste Tag* (vols. 22/23).

Source text · A public-domain digital transcription of the Kurt Wolff edition, printing dated 1917. Translated directly from the German.

Extent · Complete and unabridged · three parts · 97 paragraphs, as in the original · no translator's notes

Copyright · The author died in 1924; the original work is in the public domain.

This translation · Translated from the German by Ether Library. The English text is © Ether Library and is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0): you may copy and share it for noncommercial purposes, with attribution.

Edition · English edition 1.0 · October 2026

Typography · Set in Lora (SIL Open Font License 1.1). Cover painting and design by Ether Library.



Original in the public domain · English translation **CC BY-NC 4.0**

Ether Library · No. 0019