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# THE METAMORPHOSIS

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## FRANZ KAFKA

**Includes detailed explanatory notes,  
an overview of key themes, and more**

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THE  
METAMORPHOSIS



*Franz Kafka*

*Translated from the German by Ian Johnston*  
*Supplementary materials written by Laura Nathan*  
*Series edited by Cynthia Brantley Johnson*

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# INTRODUCTION

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## *The Metamorphosis:* THE MONSTROSITY OF ALIENATION

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In *The Metamorphosis* (1915), Franz Kafka created Gregor Samsa, a young, unhappy salesman who overnight is transformed into a monstrous-looking insect. Gregor is barely understood when he speaks, his vision quickly deteriorates, and no one seems to take his feelings into account. Disgusted and burdened by what Gregor has become, his self-absorbed family sentences him to life alone in his room.

Originally written and published in German, *The Metamorphosis* was read by few people in Kafka's lifetime. Only after it was translated into English in 1937 and published in the United States in 1946 did the strangely compelling book begin to reach a larger audience. Early critics read *The Metamorphosis* as Kafka's autobiography, citing parallels between Kafka's overbearing father and the coldhearted Samsa patriarch, as well as between the neurotic Franz Kafka and Gregor. Although the Samsas appear to be Catholic, critics have also suggested that Gregor's alienation mirrored Kafka's feelings of marginalization as a member of a Jewish minority and as someone who, further, felt like an outsider among Jews.

Critics and readers alike also offer various opinions of the central premise of the story: Gregor's transformation. Some approach the bug at face value and read *The Metamorphosis* as a surreal, fantastical tale in which Gregor actually becomes a bug. Others suggest the transformation is merely symbolic, arguing that the metamorphosis is a metaphor for the loathsome nature of modern life, middle-class life, of a traveling salesman's life, or of Gregor's failure as a businessman.

Though *The Metamorphosis* is set in Kafka's native Prague in the lead-up to World War I, Gregor's alienation, despair, frustration, and even hope remain familiar—nearly a century later—to everyone who has ever felt like an outsider, or anyone who has felt that there must be more to life than what they have been offered. Not surprisingly, Gregor Samsa is now one of twentieth-century literature's best-known characters. Dozens of movies, television shows, songs, comics, and video games—from *The Simpsons* to *The Producers*—have mentioned *The Metamorphosis* and Gregor Samsa. Clearly, there is something of “the bug” in all of us.

### **The Life and Work of Franz Kafka**

Franz Kafka was born on July 3, 1883, to Hermann and Julie Kafka in Prague, today located in the Czech Republic. Julie gave birth to two more sons, Georg and Heinrich, but both died as infants. Kafka also had three sisters, Gabriele, Valerie, and Otilie, who was his favorite sister.

The Kafkas' circumstances of being middle-class Jews who spoke German in a Czech-speaking country at a time when anti-Semitism was rampant in Prague made Franz feel like an outcast throughout his life. His family built two successful businesses, first as retailers of luxury goods and accessories, then—like many Jews of the time—as wholesalers for sewing goods such as buttons, ribbons, and zippers. His parents often worked twelve hours a day, leaving governesses and servants to raise him and his sisters.



In 1901, after attending German boys' primary and secondary schools alongside other middle-class Jews, Kafka entered law school at Charles-Ferdinand University, the German university in Prague. While there, he took a few German literature courses and became part of Prague's increasing popular German-language literary scene, attending readings and participating in reading groups. It was during this time that he met Max Brod, who would become his lifelong friend and editor.

Despite receiving his law degree in 1906, Kafka worked in the legal field for only one year, as an intern in Prague's civil and criminal courts. However, that year appears to have influenced him greatly: Many of his works concern bureaucracy and the legal system.

He considered writing his true profession but worried it would not provide him with sufficient money to live. He sought a reliable job with a steady income and found his niche in the insurance industry, working briefly for a small private company, then for the Workmen's Accident Insurance Institute for the Kingdom of Bohemia in Prague. Kafka rose to a position of authority and continued working for the insurance company there until he retired in 1922.

Because his brothers had died as infants and his sisters were born when he was already in school, Kafka had borne the brunt of his overbearing father's temper and stubbornness. Even as an adult, he remained bitter about his childhood. In a now-famous 1919 letter that he wrote to his father but never sent, he claimed he was a "timid, hesitant, restless person" because he feared his father. Writing, despite his father's objections, became his one escape, albeit an imperfect one: His relationship with his father found its way into everything he wrote.

Despite his claim that Judaism was alienating and that he had nothing in common with synagogue-going Jews like his father, Kafka developed a keen interest in Jewish culture and spirituality as an adult. Not only did he read a lot of Yiddish literature and enjoy Yiddish theater; he studied Hebrew and dreamed of moving to Palestine in the Land of Israel, which during his lifetime was not an independent nation. However, he almost never mentioned Judaism in his writing.

Kafka suffered from social anxiety and depression and often battled stress-induced ailments like migraines, insomnia, constipation, and boils. He would probably not be considered a fully functioning adult by today's standards. Only in 1915—the year *The Metamorphosis* was published—did he finally begin to live on his own in Prague. By then, he was thirty-two years old and had already broken off his first engagement to Felice Bauer, a Jewish woman he'd met through Max Brod. The couple became engaged again in 1917, but their relationship fizzled after Kafka was diagnosed with tuberculosis in September of that same year. He had three more serious relationships, including a second engagement to Julie Wohryzek, but he never married.

The year before his death, Kafka moved to Berlin to live with kindergarten teacher Dora Diamant. She burned several of his manuscripts at his request, an order that reflected Kafka's dissatisfaction with his writing. *The Metamorphosis*, however, was among the handful of works he considered worthy, though he told friends he was unhappy with the ending.

When Kafka's tuberculosis made him too sick to care for himself, he moved back to Prague to live with his parents. As his condition deteriorated, Diamant traveled with him to seek treatment at a series of sanatoriums. Unable to eat for days, he died of starvation on June 3, 1924, while seeking treatment near Vienna. Kafka was buried at the New Jewish Cemetery in Prague, just one month short of his forty-first birthday. *The Hunger Artist*, which had gone to press one year earlier, was published later that year.

Following Kafka's death, his friend Max Brod discovered a letter instructing him to burn all of his stories, letters, journals, and sketches. Brod ignored his friend's wishes, however, and saw to it that *The Trial* (1925), *The Castle* (1926), and *Amerika* (1927)—the first two of which were incomplete—

were published. More than a decade after his death, Kafka's works were first translated and published in English, and they continue to be retranslated, published, and discussed throughout the world today.

## **Historical and Literary Context of *The Metamorphosis***

### *The Rise of Socialism and Workers' Rights Movements*

Gregor Samsa was not the first person to hate his job. Between 1880 and 1914, Prague was undergoing rapid urbanization and industrialization, and workers' rights movements were gaining ground throughout Europe thanks, in part, to German philosopher Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto* (1848), which criticized capitalism for oppressing working-class people. The ideas in *The Communist Manifesto* spurred the rise of the Social Democratic Workers' Party of Germany (1869, later called the Social Democratic Party), which fought for trade unions to support workers' rights. Similar workers' rights movements took hold in Britain, Russia, and even Austria-Hungary, which gave workers a day off when the country celebrated its first May Day in 1890. After the Social Democratic Party prevailed in Germany's 1912 general election, German socialists called for international working-class solidarity.

### *The Place of Minorities in the Austro-Hungarian Empire*

Kafka's native Prague—presumably the setting of *The Metamorphosis*—was located in the Kingdom of Bohemia in the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1867–1918), which underwent constant turmoil and expansion throughout the second half of the 1800s until it was dissolved at the end of World War I. Like other empires, Austria-Hungary, which annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1908, sought to expand its dominion. But expanded territory came with several problems. Religious and ethnic minorities within newly annexed lands were treated as outsiders in their own homelands. A large militant group of Czech nationalists was especially resistant to Austro-Hungarian rule. Because they spoke German rather than Czech, the majority language, Prague Jews like the Kafkas were both persecuted and alienated, since they were neither Christian nor “pure” Czech. For several decades the Czech majority refused to recognize German speakers and, in 1897, passed the Gausso language decrees, which permitted making Czech the official language in mixed German-Czech communities.

During this time, Prague was experiencing a wave of violent anti-Semitism. Protesters looted Jewish businesses, smashed synagogue windows, and assaulted Jews for three days in 1897. Two years later, a teenage Czech Christian girl was found dead, and a Jewish man was accused and convicted of her murder, re-igniting anti-Semitic sentiments.

In 1914 Austro-Hungarian Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the throne, and his wife were assassinated by a Serbian nationalist. Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia (the two countries had been at odds for years), and, because of an elaborate system of alliances among the various ruling families of Europe, soon most of the continent was embroiled in World War I; some nations (such as Germany and the Ottoman Empire) sided with Austria-Hungary, and others (such as Great Britain, France, Russia, and later the United States) sided against Austria-Hungary. The empire dissolved at the end of the war in 1918, but the nationalist sentiments persisted among many Czechs, Serbians,

and other groups that had formerly been part of the empire.

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## *Existentialism*

Because it deals with the theme of estrangement, *The Metamorphosis* is often categorized as the second great work of existentialism, a nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophical and literary movement that stressed the absurdity of existence and the disorienting effects of modern life. The first work of existentialism was Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* (1864), which tells the story of a man who cannot find his place in society and cannot find happiness in the identities he forges for himself. The existentialist movement was largely informed by the work of German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), generally considered a nihilist (someone who believes that human life has no meaning or purpose). Kafka had certainly read the works of Nietzsche, and there is a certain Nietzschean hopelessness in *The Metamorphosis*. However, Albert Camus (1913–1960), the French author of the renowned existentialist novels *The Stranger* (1942) and *The Plague* (1947), later suggested that Kafka was not a true existentialist, since there was a glimmer of hope in his work.

## *Influences*

At the plot and symbolic level, Kafka's work can be traced to then-contemporary Germanic literature. Kafka seems to have borrowed the name Gregor Samsa from German-Jewish novelist Jacob Wassermann (1873–1934), who named his protagonist in *The Story of Young Renate Fuchs* "Gregor Samassa." Kafka also drew inspiration from Viennese author Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's 1870 novel *Venus in Furs*, which has a protagonist named Gregor, a character who turns into a dog.

In terms of writing style, Kafka looked to renowned French writer Gustave Flaubert (1821–1880), author of *Madame Bovary* (1857), as a model of stylistic precision and restraint. Flaubert was famous for his carefully crafted language, insisting always upon finding *le mot juste*—the "perfect word"—for what he wanted to express. While Kafka's legal background also encouraged this type of writing, critic and novelist Vladimir Nabokov later suggested that Kafka purposefully modeled his writing after Flaubert's to create simple, truthful, and one-of-a-kind language.



# CHRONOLOGY OF FRANZ KAFKA'S LIFE AND WORK

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- 1883: Born on July 3 in Prague.
- 1885–88: Brothers Georg and Heinrich born; both die as infants.
- 1889–92: Sisters Gabriele, Valerie, and Ottilie born.
- 1901: Enters Charles-Ferdinand University in Prague; studies law.
- 1902: Meets lifelong friend and editor Max Brod.
- 1906: Graduates and clerks for the civil and criminal courts.
- 1907: Begins insurance sales job.
- 1908: “Meditation” published in *Hyperion*.
- 1912: Writes *The Metamorphosis*; *Meditation* published in book form.
- 1913: “The Judgment” published.
- 1914: Engaged to Felice Bauer; breaks up one month later.
- 1915: *The Metamorphosis* published. Wins Fontane Literary Prize for “The Stoker.” Reunites with Felice Bauer; lives on his own for the first time in Prague.
- 1917: Second engagement to Felice Bauer; ends after Kafka is diagnosed with tuberculosis.
- 1919: *In the Penal Colony* and *A Country Doctor* published. Writes never-mailed “Letter to My Father.” Engaged to Julie Wohryzek.
- 1920: Meets Milena Jesenská; ends engagement to Julie Wohryzek.
- 1921: Romantically involved with Milena Jesenská.
- 1922: Retires from insurance industry. Lives with sister Ottilie in the Czech provinces.
- 1923: Lives with Dora Diamant in Berlin.
- 1924: Becomes ill; lives with parents in Prague; seeks treatment near Vienna. Dies on June 3; buried at Prague’s New Jewish Cemetery on June 11. *A Hunger Artist* published posthumously.
- 1925: *The Trial* published.
- 1926: *The Castle* published.
- 1927: *Amerika* published.
- 1937: First English publication of *The Metamorphosis* in the U.K.; translated by A. L. Lloyd.
- 1946: First U.S. publication of *The Metamorphosis*, translated by Lloyd.

# HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF

## *The Metamorphosis*



- 1869: Social Democratic Workers' Party of Germany founded.
- 1880–1914: Prague undergoes rapid urbanization and industrialization.
- 1886: German deputies leave Bohemian legislature, protesting Czechs' refusal to recognize German-speaking areas.
- 1890: German deputies return to Bohemian legislature; Austria-Hungary celebrates first May Day (workers' holiday).
- 1895: Vladimir Lenin leads struggle for working-class liberation in Russia; arrested and banished to Siberia.
- 1897: Anti-Semitic riots and assaults in Prague. Czech permitted to be official language in mixed German-Czech communities. Theodore Herzl suggests establishing Jewish homeland in Palestine.
- 1899: Christian girl's murder by Jewish man fuels anti-Semitism in Prague.
- 1900–07: Recession in Austria-Hungary.
- 1905: First Russian Revolution.
- 1907: Austria-Hungary allows universal suffrage; increases influence in the Balkans and begins working closely with Germany.
- 1908: Austria-Hungary annexes Bosnia and Herzegovina. German-speaking minority shuts down Bohemia's regional parliament.
- 1912: German Social Democratic Party wins election, asserts international proletarian (working-class) solidarity.
- 1914: Austria-Hungary declares war on Serbia following assassination of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand d'Este, and his wife. World War I begins.
- 1918: U.S. President Woodrow Wilson, in a joint session of Congress, calls for self-determination for Austro-Hungarian minorities in his Fourteen Points. Czechs take action against separatists. World War I ends in November.
- 1919: Austro-Hungarian empire collapses; food shortages and demonstrations in Prague.
- 1920: Anti-Semitic riots in Prague.
- 1937: *The Metamorphosis* published in English.
- 1946: *The Metamorphosis* published in the United States.

# THE METAMORPHOSIS

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ONE MORNING, as Gregor Samsa<sup>1</sup> was waking up from anxious dreams,<sup>2</sup> he discovered that in bed he had been changed into a monstrous verminous bug.<sup>3</sup> He lay on his armor-hard back and saw, when he lifted his head up a little, his brown, arched abdomen divided up into rigid bowlike sections. From this height the blanket, just about ready to slide off completely, could hardly stay in place. His numerous legs, pitifully thin in comparison to the rest of his circumference, flickered helplessly before his eyes.

“What’s happened to me,” he thought. It was no dream. His room, a proper room for a human being, only somewhat too small, lay quietly between the four well-known walls. Above the table, on which an unpacked collection of sample cloth goods was spread out—Samsa was a traveling salesman—hung the picture that he had cut out of an illustrated magazine<sup>4</sup> a little while ago and set in a pretty gilt frame.<sup>5</sup> It was a picture of a woman with a fur hat and a fur boa.<sup>6</sup> She sat erect there, lifting up in the direction of the viewer a solid fur muff into which her entire forearm had disappeared.

Gregor’s glaze then turned to the window. The dreary weather—the raindrops were falling audibly down on the metal window ledge—made him quite melancholy. “Why don’t I keep sleeping for a little while longer and forget all this foolishness,” he thought. But this was entirely impractical for he was used to sleeping on his right side, and in his present state he couldn’t get himself into that position. No matter how hard he threw himself onto his right side, he always rolled again onto his back. He must have tried it a hundred times, closing his eyes so that he would not have to see the wriggling legs, and gave up only when he began to feel a light, dull pain in his side, which he had never felt before.

“O God,” he thought, “what a demanding job I’ve chosen! Day in, day out, on the road. The stresses of selling are much greater than the work going on at the head office, and, in addition to that, I have to cope with the problems of traveling, the worries about train connections, irregular bad food, temporary and constantly changing human relationships, which never come from the heart. To handle all this with it all!” He felt a slight itching on the top of his abdomen. He slowly pushed himself on his back closer to the bedpost, so that he could lift his head more easily, and found the itchy part, which was entirely covered with small white spots—he did not know what to make of them and wanted to feel the place with a leg. But he retracted it immediately, for the contact felt like a cold shower all over him.

He slid back again into his earlier position. “This getting up early,” he thought, “makes a man quite idiotic. A man must have his sleep. Other traveling salesmen live like harem women. For instance, when I come back to the inn during the course of the morning to write up the necessary orders, these gentlemen are just sitting down to breakfast. If I were to try that with my boss, I’d be thrown out on the spot. Still, who knows whether that mightn’t be really good for me? If I didn’t hold back for my parents’ sake, I’d have quit ages ago. I would’ve gone to the boss and told him just what I think from the bottom of my heart. He would’ve fallen right off his desk! How weird it is to sit up at that desk and talk down to the employee from way up there. The boss has trouble hearing, so the

employee has to step up quite close to him. Anyway, I haven't completely given up that hope yet. ~~Once I've gotten together the money to pay off my parents' debt to him—that should take another~~ five or six years—I'll do it for sure. Then I'll make the big break. In any case, right now I have to get up. My train leaves at five o'clock."

He looked over at the alarm clock ticking away by the chest of drawers. "Good God!"<sup>7</sup> he thought. It was half past six, and the hands were going quietly on. It was past the half hour, already near quarter to. Could the alarm have failed to ring? One saw from the bed that it was properly set for five o'clock. Certainly it had rung. Yes, but was it possible to sleep through that noise that made the furniture shake? Now, it's true he'd not slept quietly, but evidently he'd slept all the more deeply. Still, what should he do now? The next train left at seven o'clock. To catch that one, he would have to go in a mad rush. The sample collection<sup>8</sup> wasn't packed up yet, and he really didn't feel particularly fresh and active. And even if he caught the train, there was no avoiding a blowup with the boss, because the firm's errand boy would've waited for the five o'clock train and reported the news of his absence long ago. He was the boss's minion,<sup>9</sup> without backbone or intelligence. Well, then, what if he reported in sick? But that would be extremely embarrassing and suspicious, because during his five years' service Gregor hadn't been sick even once. The boss would certainly come with the doctor from the health insurance company and would reproach his parents for their lazy son and cut short all objections with the insurance doctor's comments; for him everyone was completely healthy but really lazy about work. And besides, would the doctor in this case be totally wrong? Apart from a really excessive drowsiness after the long sleep, Gregor in fact felt quite well and even had a really strong appetite.

As he was thinking all this over in the greatest haste, without being able to make the decision to get out of bed—the alarm clock was indicating exactly quarter to seven—there was a cautious knocking on the door by the head of the bed. "Gregor," a voice called—it was his mother!—"it's quarter to seven. Don't you want to be on your way?" The soft voice! Gregor was startled when he heard his voice answering. It was clearly and unmistakably his earlier voice, but in it was intermingled, as if from below, an irrepressibly painful squeaking, which left the words positively distinct only in the first moment and distorted them in the reverberation, so that one didn't know if one had heard correctly.<sup>10</sup> Gregor wanted to answer in detail and explain everything, but in these circumstances he confined himself to saying, "Yes, yes, thank you, Mother. I'm getting up right away." Because of the wooden door the change in Gregor's voice was not really noticeable outside, so his mother calmed down with this explanation and shuffled off. However, as a result of the short conversation, the other family members became aware that Gregor was unexpectedly still at home, and already his father was knocking on one side door, weakly but with his fist. "Gregor, Gregor," he called out, "what's going on?" And, after a short while, he urged him on again in a deeper voice: "Gregor! Gregor!" At the other side door, however, his sister knocked lightly. "Gregor? Are you all right? Do you need anything?" Gregor directed answers in both directions: "I'll be ready right away." He made an effort with the most careful articulation and by inserting long pauses between the individual words to remove everything remarkable from his voice. His father turned back to his breakfast. However, the sister whispered, "Gregor, open the door—I beg you." Gregor had no intention of opening the door, but he congratulated himself on his precaution, acquired from traveling, of locking all doors during the night, even at home.

First he wanted to stand up quietly and undisturbed, get dressed, above all have breakfast, and only then consider further action, for—he noticed this clearly—by thinking things over in bed he would not reach a reasonable conclusion. He remembered that he had already often felt a light pain

or other in bed, perhaps the result of an awkward lying position, which later turned out to be pure imaginary when he stood up, and he was eager to see how his present fantasies would gradually dissipate. That the change in his voice was nothing other than the onset of a real chill, an occupational illness<sup>11</sup> of commercial travelers, of that he had not the slightest doubt.

It was very easy to throw aside the blanket. He needed only to push himself up a little, and it fell by itself. But to continue was difficult, particularly because he was so unusually wide. He needed his arms and hands to push himself upright. Instead of these, however, he had only many small limbs which were incessantly moving with very different motions and which, in addition, he was unable to control. If he wanted to bend one of them, then it was the first to extend itself, and if he finally succeeded doing what he wanted with this limb, in the meantime all the others, as if left free, moved around in an excessively painful agitation. "But I must not stay in bed uselessly," said Gregor to himself.

At first he wanted to get out of bed with the lower part of his body, but this lower part—which, by the way, he had not yet looked at and which he also couldn't picture clearly—proved itself to be difficult to move. The attempt went so slowly. When, having become almost frantic, he finally hurled himself forward with all his force and without thinking, he chose his direction incorrectly, and he hit the lower bedpost hard. The violent pain he felt revealed to him that the lower part of his body was at the moment probably the most sensitive.

Thus he tried to get his upper body out of the bed first and turned his head carefully toward the edge of the bed. He managed to do this easily, and in spite of its width<sup>12</sup> and weight his body mass at last slowly followed the turning of his head. But as he finally raised his head outside the bed into the open air, he became anxious about moving forward any farther in this manner, for if he allowed himself eventually to fall by this process, it would take a miracle to prevent his head from getting injured.<sup>13</sup> And at all costs he must not lose consciousness right now. He preferred to remain in bed.

However, after a similar effort, while he lay there again, sighing as before, and once again saw his small limbs fighting one another, if anything worse than earlier, and didn't see any chance of imposing quiet and order on this arbitrary movement, he told himself again that he couldn't possibly remain in bed and that it might be the most reasonable thing to sacrifice everything if there was even the slightest hope of getting himself out of bed in the process. At the same moment, however, he didn't forget to remind himself from time to time of the fact that calm—indeed, the calmest—reflection might be better than the most confused decisions. At such moments, he directed his gaze as precisely as he could toward the window, but unfortunately there was little confident cheer to be had from a glance at the morning mist, which concealed even the other side of the narrow street. "It's already seven o'clock," he told himself at the latest striking of the alarm clock, "already seven o'clock and still such a fog." And for a little while longer he lay quietly with weak breathing, as if perhaps waiting for normal and natural conditions to reemerge out of the complete stillness.

But then he said to himself, "Before it strikes a quarter past seven, whatever happens I must be completely out of bed. Besides, by then someone from the office will arrive to inquire about me because the office will open before seven o'clock." And he made an effort then to rock his entire body length out of the bed with a uniform motion. If he let himself fall out of the bed in this way, his head, which in the course of the fall he intended to lift up sharply, would probably remain uninjured. His back seemed to be hard; nothing would really happen to that as a result of the fall. His greatest reservation was a worry about the loud noise that the fall must create and that presumably would arouse, if not fright, then at least concern on the other side of all the doors. However, it had to be tried.



As Gregor was in the process of lifting himself half out of bed—the new method was more of a game than an effort, he needed only to rock with a constant rhythm—it struck him how easy all this would be if someone were to come to his aid. Two strong people—he thought of his father and the servant girl<sup>14</sup>—would have been quite sufficient. They would have only had to push their arms under his arched back to get him out of the bed, to bend down with their load, and then merely to exercise patience and care that he completed the flip onto the floor, where his diminutive legs would then, he hoped, acquire a purpose. Now, quite apart from the fact that the doors were locked, should he really call out for help? In spite of all his distress, he was unable to suppress a smile at this idea.

He had already gotten to the point where, by rocking more strongly, he maintained his equilibrium with difficulty, and very soon he would finally have to decide, for in five minutes it would be a quarter past seven. Then there was a ring at the door of the apartment. “That’s someone from the office,” he told himself, and he almost froze while his small limbs only danced around all the faster. For one moment everything remained still. “They aren’t opening,” Gregor said to himself, caught up in some absurd hope. But of course then, as usual, the servant girl with her firm tread went to the door and opened it. Gregor needed to hear only the first word of the visitor’s greeting to recognize immediately who it was, the manager himself. Why was Gregor the only one condemned to work in a firm where, at the slightest lapse, someone immediately attracted the greatest suspicion? Were all the employees then collectively, one and all, scoundrels? Among them was there then not a truly devoted person who, if he failed to use just a couple of hours in the morning for office work, would become abnormal from pangs of conscience and really be in no state to get out of bed? Was that really not enough to let an apprentice make inquiries, if such questioning was even necessary? Must the manager himself come, and in the process must it be demonstrated to the entire innocent family that the investigation of this suspicious circumstance could be entrusted only to the intelligence of the manager? And more as a consequence of the excited state in which this idea put Gregor than as a result of an actual decision, he swung himself with all his might out of the bed. There was a loud thud, but not a real crash. The fall was absorbed somewhat by the carpet and, in addition, his back was more elastic than Gregor had thought. For that reason the dull noise was not quite so conspicuous. But he had not held his head up with sufficient care and had hit it. He turned his head, irritated and in pain, and rubbed it on the carpet.

“Something has fallen in there,” said the manager in the next room on the left. Gregor tried to imagine to himself whether anything similar to what was happening to him today could have also happened at some point to the manager. At least one had to concede the possibility of such a thing. However, as if to give a rough answer to this question, the manager now, with a squeak of his polished boots, took a few determined steps in the next room. From the neighboring room on the right the sister was whispering to inform Gregor: “Gregor, the manager is here.” “I know,” said Gregor to himself. But he did not dare make his voice loud enough so that his sister could hear.

“Gregor,” his father now said from the neighboring room on the left, “Mr. Manager<sup>15</sup> has come and is asking why you have not left on the early train. We don’t know what we should tell him. Besides, he also wants to speak to you personally. So please open the door. He will be good enough to forgive the mess in your room.” In the middle of all this, the manager called out in a friendly way: “Good morning, Mr. Samsa.” “He is not well,” said his mother to the manager, while his father was still talking at the door. “He is not well, believe me, Mr. Manager. Otherwise how would Gregor miss a train? The young man has nothing in his head except business. I’m almost angry that he never goes out at night. Right now he’s been in the city eight days, but he’s been at home every evening. He sits here with us at the table and reads the newspaper quietly or studies his travel schedules. It’s quite

diversion for him to busy himself with fretwork.<sup>16</sup> For instance, he cut out a small frame over the course of two or three evenings. You'd be amazed how pretty it is. It's hanging right inside the room.<sup>17</sup> You'll see it immediately, as soon as Gregor opens the door. Anyway, I'm happy that you're here, Mr. Manager. By ourselves, we would never have made Gregor open the door. He's so stubborn, and he's certainly not well, although he denied that this morning." "I'm coming right away," said Gregor slowly and deliberately and didn't move, so as not to lose one word of the conversation. "My dear lady, I cannot explain it to myself in any other way," said the manager; I hope it is nothing serious. On the other hand, I must also say that we business people, luckily or unluckily, however one looks at it, very often simply have to overcome a slight indisposition<sup>18</sup> for business reasons." "So can Mr. Manager come in to see you now?" asked his father impatiently and knocked once again on the door. "No," said Gregor. In the neighboring room on the left a painful stillness descended. In the neighboring room on the right the sister began to sob.

Why didn't his sister go to the others? She'd probably just gotten up out of bed now and hadn't even started to get dressed yet. Then why was she crying? Because he wasn't getting up and wasn't letting the manager in, because he was in danger of losing his position, and because then his boss would badger his parents once again with the old demands? Those were probably unnecessary worries right now. Gregor was still here and wasn't thinking at all about abandoning his family. At the moment he was lying right there on the carpet, and no one who knew about his condition would've seriously demanded that he let the manager in. But Gregor wouldn't be casually dismissed right away because of this small discourtesy, for which he would find an easy and suitable excuse later on. It seemed to Gregor that it might be far more reasonable to leave him in peace at the moment, instead of disturbing him with crying and conversation. But it was the very uncertainty that distressed the others and excused their behavior.

"Mr. Samsa," the manager was now shouting, his voice raised, "what's the matter? You are barricading yourself in your room, answer with only a yes and a no, are making serious and unnecessary troubles for your parents, and neglecting (I mention this only incidentally) your commercial duties in a truly unheard-of manner. I am speaking here in the name of your parents and your employer, and I am requesting you in all seriousness for an immediate and clear explanation. I am amazed. I am amazed. I thought I knew you as a calm, reasonable person, and now you appear suddenly to want to start parading around in weird moods. The Chief indicated to me earlier the very day a possible explanation for your neglect—it concerned the collection of cash entrusted to you a short while ago—but in truth I almost gave him my word of honor that this explanation could not be correct. However, now I see here your unimaginable pigheadedness, and I am totally losing all desire to speak up for you in the slightest. And your position is not at all the most secure. Originally I intended to mention all this to you privately, but since you are letting me waste my time here uselessly, I don't know why the matter shouldn't come to the attention of your parents. Your productivity has also been very unsatisfactory recently. Of course, it's not the time of year to conduct exceptional business, we recognize that, but a time of year for conducting no business, there is not such thing at all, Mr. Samsa, and such a thing must never be."

"But Mr. Manager," called Gregor, beside himself and, in his agitation, forgetting everything else. "I'm opening the door immediately, this very moment. A slight indisposition, a dizzy spell, has prevented me from getting up. I'm still lying in bed right now. But I'm quite refreshed once again. I'm in the midst of getting out of bed. Just have patience for a short moment! Things are not going as well as I thought. But things are all right. How suddenly this can overcome someone! Only yesterday evening everything was fine with me. My parents certainly know that. Actually just yesterday evening

I had a small premonition. People must have seen that in me. Why have I not reported that to the office? But people always think that they'll get over sickness without having to stay at home. Mr. Manager! Take it easy on my parents! There is really no basis for the criticisms that you're now making against me, and really nobody has said a word to me about that. Perhaps you have not read the latest orders that I shipped. Besides, now I'm setting out on my trip on the eight o'clock train; the few hours' rest have made me stronger. Mr. Manager, do not stay. I will be at the office in person right away. Please have the goodness to say that and to convey my respects to the Chief!"

While Gregor was quickly blurting all this out, hardly aware of what he was saying, he had moved close to the chest of drawers without effort, probably as a result of the practice he had already had in bed, and now he was trying to raise himself up on it. Actually, he wanted to open the door. He really wanted to let himself be seen by and to speak with the manager. He was keen to witness what the others now asking about him would say when they saw him. If they were startled, then Gregor had no more responsibility and could be calm. But if they accepted everything quietly, then he would have no reason to get excited and, if he got a move on, could really be at the station around eight o'clock. At first he slid down a few times on the smooth chest of drawers. But at last he gave himself a final swing and stood upright there. He was no longer at all aware of the pains in his lower body, no matter how they might still sting. Now he let himself fall against the back of a nearby chair, on the edge of which he braced himself with his thin limbs. By doing this he gained control over himself and kept quiet, for he could now hear the manager.

"Did you understand a single word?" the manager asked the parents. "Is he playing the fool with us?" "For God's sake," cried the mother, already in tears, "perhaps he's very ill and we're upsetting him. Grete! Grete!" she yelled at that point. "Mother?" called the sister from the other side. They were making themselves understood through Gregor's room. "You must go to the doctor right away. Gregor is sick. Hurry to the doctor. Have you heard Gregor speak yet?" "That was an animal's voice," said the manager, remarkably quietly in comparison to the mother's cries. "Anna! Anna!" yelled the father through the hall into the kitchen, clapping his hands, "fetch a locksmith right away!" The two young women were already running through the hall with swishing skirts—how had his sister dressed herself so quickly?—and yanked open the doors of the apartment. One couldn't hear the doors closing at all. They probably had left them open, as is customary<sup>19</sup> in an apartment where a huge misfortune has taken place.

However, Gregor had become much calmer. All right, people did not understand his words anymore, although they seemed clear enough to him, clearer than previously, perhaps because his ears had gotten used to them. But at least people now thought that things were not all right with him and were prepared to help him. The confidence and assurance with which the first arrangements had been carried out made him feel good. He felt himself included once again in the circle of humanity and was expecting from both the doctor and the locksmith, without differentiating between them with any real precision, splendid and surprising results. In order to get as clear a voice as possible for the critical conversation that was imminent, he coughed a little, and certainly took the trouble to do this in a really subdued way, since it was possible that even this noise sounded like something different from a human cough. He no longer trusted himself to decide anymore. Meanwhile in the next room it had become really quiet. Perhaps his parents were sitting with the manager at the table whispering; perhaps they were all leaning against the door listening.

Gregor pushed himself slowly toward the door, with the help of the easy chair, let go of it then, threw himself against the door, held himself upright against it—the balls of his tiny limbs had a little sticky stuff on them—and rested there momentarily from his exertion. Then he made an effort

turn the key in the lock with his mouth. Unfortunately it seemed that he had no real teeth. How was he to grab hold of the key? But to make up for that his jaws were naturally very strong; with the help he managed to get the key really moving. He didn't notice that he was obviously inflicting some damage on himself, for a brown fluid came out of his mouth, flowed over the key, and dripped on the floor. "Just listen for a moment," said the manager in the next room; "he's turning the key." For Gregor that was a great encouragement. But they all should've called out to him, including his father and mother. "Come on, Gregor," they should've shouted; "keep going, keep working on the lock." Imagining that all his efforts were being followed with suspense, he bit down frantically on the key with all the force he could muster. As the key turned more, he danced around the lock. Now he was holding himself upright only with his mouth, and he had to hang on to the key or then press it down again with the whole weight of his body, as necessary. The quite distinct click of the lock as it finally snapped really woke Gregor up. Breathing heavily, he said to himself, "So I didn't need the locksmith," and he set his head against the door handle to open the door completely.

Because he had to open the door in this way, it was already open very wide without him yet being really visible. He first had to turn himself slowly around the edge of the door, very carefully, of course, if he didn't want to fall awkwardly on his back right at the entrance into the room. He was so preoccupied with this difficult movement and had no time to pay attention to anything else, when he heard the manager exclaim a loud "Oh!"—it sounded like the wind whistling—and now he saw him nearest to the door, pressing his hand against his open mouth and moving slowly back, as if an invisible constant force was pushing him away. His mother—in spite of the presence of the manager she was standing there with her hair sticking up on end, still a mess from the night—was looking at his father with her hands clasped. She then went two steps toward Gregor and collapsed right in the middle of her skirts, which were spread out all around her, her face sunk on her breast, completely concealed. His father clenched his fist with a hostile expression, as if he wished to push Gregor back into his room, then looked uncertainly around the living room, covered his eyes with his hands, and cried so that his mighty chest shook.

At this point Gregor did not take one step into the room but leaned his body from the inside against the firmly bolted wing of the door, so that only half his body was visible, as well as his head tilted sideways, with which he peeped over at the others. Meanwhile it had become much brighter. Standing out clearly from the other side of the street was a part of the endless gray-black houses situated opposite—it was a hospital—with its severe regular windows breaking up the facade. The rain was still coming down, but only in large individual drops visibly and firmly thrown down one by one onto the ground. The breakfast dishes were standing piled around on the table, because for his father breakfast was the most important mealtime in the day, which he prolonged for hours by reading various newspapers. Directly across on the opposite wall hung a photograph of Gregor from the time of his military service; it was a picture of him as a lieutenant, as he, smiling and worry-free with his hand on his sword, demanded respect for his bearing and uniform. The door to the hall was ajar, and since the door to the apartment was also open, one could see out into the landing of the apartment and the start of the staircase going down.

"Now," said Gregor, well aware that he was the only one who had kept his composure. "I'll get dressed right away, pack up the collection of samples, and set off. You'll allow me to set out on my way, will you not? You see, Mr. Manager, I am not pigheaded, and I am happy to work. Traveling is exhausting, but I couldn't live without it. Where are you going, Mr. Manager? To the office? Really? Will you report everything truthfully? A person can be incapable of work momentarily, but that's precisely the best time to remember the earlier achievements and to consider that later, after the

obstacles have been shoved aside, the person will work all the more eagerly and intensely. I am real-  
so indebted to Mr. Chief—you know that perfectly well. On the other hand, I am concerned about  
my parents and my sister. I'm in a fix, but I'll work myself out of it again. Don't make things more  
difficult for me than they already are. Speak up on my behalf in the office! People don't like traveling  
salesmen. I know that. People think they earn pots of money and thus lead a fine life. People don't  
even have any special reason to think through this judgment more clearly. But you, Mr. Manager,  
you have a better perspective on what's involved than other people, even, I tell you in total  
confidence, a better perspective than Mr. Chairman himself, who in his capacity as the employer  
may let his judgment make casual mistakes at the expense of an employee. You also know well  
enough that the traveling salesman who is outside the office almost the entire year can become  
easily a victim of gossip, coincidences, and groundless complaints, against which it's impossible for  
him to defend himself, since for the most part he doesn't hear about them at all and only then when  
he's exhausted after finishing a trip and at home gets to feel in his own body the nasty consequences  
which can't be thoroughly explored back to their origins. Mr. Manager, don't leave without speaking  
a word telling me that you'll at least concede that I'm a little in the right!"

But at Gregor's first words the manager had already turned away, and now he looked back at  
Gregor over his twitching shoulders with pursed lips. During Gregor's speech he was not still for a  
moment but kept moving away toward the door, without taking his eyes off Gregor, but really  
gradually, as if there was a secret ban on leaving the room. He was already in the hall, and given the  
sudden movement with which he finally pulled his foot out of the living room, one could have  
believed that he had just burned the sole of his foot. In the hall, however, he stretched his right hand  
out away from his body toward the staircase, as if some truly supernatural relief was waiting for him  
there.

Gregor realized that he must not under any circumstances allow the manager to go away in this  
frame of mind, especially if his position in the firm was not to be placed in the greatest danger. His  
parents did not understand all this very well. Over the long years, they had developed the conviction  
that Gregor was set up for life in his firm and, in addition, they had so much to do nowadays with  
their present troubles that all foresight was foreign to them. But Gregor had this foresight. The  
manager must be held back, calmed down, convinced, and finally won over. The future of Gregor  
and his family really depended on it! If only the sister had been there! She was clever. She had  
already cried while Gregor was still lying quietly on his back. And the manager, this friend of the  
ladies, would certainly let himself be guided by her. She would have closed the door to the  
apartment and talked him out of his fright in the hall. But the sister was not even there. Gregor must  
deal with it himself. Without thinking that as yet he didn't know anything about his present ability to  
move and that his speech possibly—indeed probably—had once again not been understood, he leapt  
to the wing of the door, pushed himself through the opening, and wanted to go over to the manager  
who was already holding tight on to the handrail with both hands on the landing in a ridiculous way.  
But as he looked for something to hold on to, with a small scream Gregor immediately fell down on  
his numerous little legs. Scarcely had this happened, when he felt for the first time that morning  
general physical well-being. The small limbs had firm floor under them; they obeyed perfectly, as he  
noticed to his joy, and strove to carry him forward in the direction he wanted. Right away he believed  
that the final amelioration of all his suffering was immediately at hand. But at the very moment when  
he lay on the floor rocking in a restrained manner quite close and directly across from his mother  
who had apparently totally sunk into herself, she suddenly sprang right up with her arms spread far  
apart and her fingers extended and cried out, "Help, for God's sake, help!" She held her head bowed



down, as if she wanted to view Gregor better, but ran senselessly back, contradicting that gesture by forgetting that behind her stood the table with all the dishes on it. When she reached the table, she sat down heavily on it, as if absentmindedly, and did not appear to notice at all that next to her coffee was pouring out onto the carpet in a full stream from the large overturned container.

“Mother, Mother,” said Gregor quietly, and looked over toward her. The manager momentarily had disappeared completely from his mind. At the sight of the flowing coffee Gregor couldn’t stop himself snapping his jaws in the air a few times. At that his mother screamed all over again, hurried from the table, and collapsed into the arms of his father, who was rushing toward her. But Gregor had no time right now for his parents—the manager was already on the staircase. His chin level with the banister, the manager looked back for the last time. Gregor took an initial movement to catch up to him if possible. But the manager must have suspected something, because he made a leap down over a few stairs and disappeared, still shouting “Huh!” The sound echoed throughout the entire stairwell. Now, unfortunately, this flight of the manager also seemed to bewilder his father completely. Earlier he had been relatively calm, for instead of running after the manager himself he at least not hindering Gregor from his pursuit, with his right hand he grabbed hold of the manager’s cane, which he had left behind with his hat and overcoat on a chair. With his left hand, his father picked up a large newspaper from the table and, stamping his feet on the floor, he set out to drive Gregor back into his room by waving the cane and the newspaper. No request of Gregor’s was of any use; no request would even be understood. No matter how willing he was to turn his head respectfully, his father just stomped all the harder with his feet. Across the room from him his mother had pulled open a window, in spite of the cool weather, and leaning out with her hands on her cheeks, she pushed her face far outside the window. Between the alley and the stairwell a strong draft came up, the curtains on the window flew around, the newspapers on the table swished, and individual sheets fluttered down over the floor. The father relentlessly pressed forward, pushing on his sibilants, like a wild man. Now, Gregor had no practice at all in going backward—it was really very slow going. If Gregor had only been allowed to turn himself around, he would have been in his room right away, but he was afraid to make his father impatient by the time-consuming process of turning around, and each moment he faced the threat of a mortal blow on his back or his head from the cane in his father’s hand. Finally Gregor had no other option, for he noticed with horror that he did not understand yet how to maintain his direction going backward. And so he began, amid constant anxious sideways glances in his father’s direction, to turn himself around as quickly as possible, although in truth this was only done very slowly. Perhaps his father noticed his good intentions, for he did not disrupt Gregor in this motion, but with the tip of the cane from a distance he even directed Gregor’s rotating movement here and there. If only his father would have stopped making that unbearable hissing sound! Because of that Gregor quite lost his head. He was already almost completely turned around, when, always with this hissing in his ear, he just made a mistake and turned himself back a little. But when he finally was successful in getting his head in front of the door opening, it became clear that his body was too wide to go through any farther. Naturally his father, in his present mental state, had no idea of opening the other wing of the door a bit to create a suitable passage for Gregor to get through. His single fixed thought was that Gregor must get into his room as quickly as possible. He would never have allowed the elaborate preparations that Gregor required to orient himself and thus perhaps get through the door. On the contrary, as if there were no obstacles and with a peculiar noise, he now drove Gregor forward. Behind Gregor the sound at this point was no longer like the voice of only a single father. Now it was really no longer a joke, and Gregor forced himself, come what might, into the door. One side of his body was lifted up. He lay at an angle in the



door opening. His one flank was sore with the scraping. On the white door ugly blotches were left. ~~Soon he was stuck fast and would have not been able to move anymore on his own. The tiny legs on~~ one side hung twitching in the air above, and the ones on the other side were pushed painfully into the floor. Then his father gave him one really strong liberating push from behind, and he scurried, bleeding severely, far into the interior of his room. The door was slammed shut with the cane, and finally there was silence.



GREGOR FIRST WOKE UP from his heavy swoonlike sleep in the evening twilight. He would certainly have woken up soon afterward without any disturbance, for he felt himself sufficiently rested and wide awake, although it appeared to him as if a hurried step and a cautious closing of the door to the hall had aroused him. Light from the electric streetlamps lay pale here and there on the ceiling and on the higher parts of the furniture, but underneath around Gregor it was dark. He pushed himself slowly toward the door, still groping awkwardly with his feelers, which he now learned to value for the first time, to check what was happening there. His left side seemed one single long unpleasantly stretched scar, and he really had to hobble on his two rows of legs. In addition, one small leg had been seriously wounded in the course of the morning incident—it was almost a miracle that only one had been hurt—and dragged lifelessly behind.

By the door he first noticed what had really lured him there: It was the smell of something to eat. A bowl stood there, filled with sweetened milk, in which swam tiny pieces of white bread. He almost laughed with joy, for he now had a much greater hunger than in the morning, and he immediately dipped his head almost up to and over his eyes down into the milk. But he soon drew it back again in disappointment, not just because it was difficult for him to eat on account of his delicate left side—he could eat only if his entire panting body worked in a coordinated way—but also because the milk, which otherwise was his favorite drink and which his sister had certainly placed there for that reason, did not appeal to him at all. He turned away from the bowl almost with aversion and crept back into the middle of the room.

In the living room, as Gregor saw through the crack in the door, the gas was lit, but where, on other occasions at this time of day, his father was accustomed to read the afternoon newspaper in a loud voice to his mother and sometimes also to his sister, at the moment no sound was audible. No, perhaps this reading aloud, about which his sister had always spoken and written to him, had recently fallen out of their general routine. But it was so still all around, in spite of the fact that the apartment was certainly not empty. “What a quiet life the family leads,” said Gregor to himself, and as he stared fixedly out in front of him into the darkness, he felt a great pride that he had been able to provide such a life in a beautiful apartment like this for his parents and his sister. But how would things go now all tranquillity, all prosperity, all contentment should come to a horrible end? In order not to lose himself in such thoughts, Gregor preferred to set himself moving, so he moved up and down in his room.

Once during the long evening one side door and then the other door was opened just a tiny crack and quickly closed again. Someone presumably needed to come in but had then thought better of it. Gregor immediately took up a position by the living-room door, determined to bring in the hesitant visitor somehow or other or at least to find out who it might be. But now the door was not opened anymore, and Gregor waited in vain. Earlier, when the door had been barred, they had all wanted to come in to him; now, when he had opened one door and when the others had obviously been opened during the day, no one came anymore, and the keys were stuck in the locks on the outside.

The light in the living room was turned off only late at night, and now it was easy to establish the

his parents and his sister had stayed awake all this time, for one could hear clearly as all three moved away on tiptoe. Now it was certain that no one would come in to Gregor anymore until the morning. Thus he had a long time to think undisturbed about how he should reorganize his life from scratch. But the high, open room, in which he was compelled to lie flat on the floor, made him anxious without his being able to figure out the reason, for he had lived in the room for five years. With a half-unconscious turn and not without a slight shame he scurried under the couch, where, in spite of the fact that his back was a little cramped and he could no longer lift up his head, he felt very comfortable and was sorry only that his body was too wide to fit completely under it.

There he remained the entire night, which he spent partly in a state of semisleep, out of which hunger constantly woke him with a start, but partly in a state of worry and murky hopes, which all led to the conclusion that for the time being he would have to keep calm and with patience and the greatest consideration for his family tolerate the troubles that in his present condition he was now forced to cause them.

Already early in the morning—it was still almost night—Gregor had an opportunity to test the power of the decisions he had just made, for his sister, almost fully dressed, opened the door from the hall into his room and looked eagerly inside. She did not find him immediately, but when she noticed him under the couch—God, he had to be somewhere or other, for he could hardly fly away—she got such a shock that, without being able to control herself, she slammed the door shut once again from the outside. However, as if she was sorry for her behavior, she immediately opened the door again and walked in on her tiptoes, as if she was in the presence of a serious invalid or a total stranger. Gregor had pushed his head forward just to the edge of the couch and was observing her. Would she really notice that he had left the milk standing, not indeed from any lack of hunger, and would she bring in something else to eat more suitable for him? If she did not do it on her own, he would sooner starve to death than call her attention to the fact, although he had a really powerful urge to move beyond the couch, throw himself at his sister's feet, and beg her for something or other good to eat. But his sister noticed right away with astonishment that the bowl was still full, with only a little milk spilled around it. She picked it up immediately, although not with her bare hands but with a rag, and took it out of the room. Gregor was extremely curious what she would bring as a substitute and he pictured to himself different ideas about it. But he never could have guessed what his sister, out of the goodness of her heart in fact did. She brought him, to test his taste, an entire selection, all spread out on an old newspaper. There were old half-rotten vegetables, bones from the evening meal, covered with a white sauce that had almost solidified, some raisins and almonds, cheese that Gregor had declared inedible two days earlier, a slice of dry bread, and a slice of salted bread smeared with butter. In addition to all this, she put down a bowl—probably designated once and for all as Gregor's—into which she had poured some water. And out of her delicacy of feeling, <sup>1</sup> since she knew that Gregor would not eat in front of her, she went away very quickly and even turned the key in the lock, so that Gregor would now observe that he could make himself as comfortable as he wished. Gregor's small limbs buzzed now that the time for eating had come. His wounds must, in any case, have already healed completely. He felt no handicap on that score. He was astonished at this and thought about how more than a month ago he had cut his finger slightly with a knife and how this wound had hurt enough even the day before yesterday. "Am I now going to be less sensitive," he thought, already sucking greedily on the cheese, which had strongly attracted him right away, more than all the other foods. Quickly and with his eyes watering with satisfaction, he ate one after the other the cheese, the vegetables, and the sauce. The fresh food, by contrast, didn't taste good to him. He couldn't bear the smell and even carried the things he wanted to eat a little distance away. By the

time his sister slowly turned the key as a sign that he should withdraw, he was long finished and no longer lay lazily in the same spot. The noise immediately startled him, in spite of the fact that he was already almost asleep, and he scurried back again under the couch. But it cost him great self-control to remain under the couch, even for the short time his sister was in the room, because his body had become filled out somewhat on account of the rich meal and in the narrow space there he could scarcely breathe. In the midst of minor attacks of asphyxiation, he looked at her with somewhat protruding eyes, as his unsuspecting sister swept up with a broom, not just the remnants, but even the foods that Gregor had not touched at all, as if these were also now useless, and as she dumped everything quickly into a bucket, which she closed with a wooden lid, and then carried all of it out of the room. She had hardly turned around before Gregor had already dragged himself out from under the couch and stretched out, and let his body expand.

In this way Gregor got his food every day, once in the morning, when his parents and the servant girl were still asleep, and a second time after the common noon meal, for his parents were, as before, asleep then for a little while, and the servant girl was sent off by his sister on some errand or other. They certainly would not have wanted Gregor to starve to death, but perhaps they could not have endured finding out what he ate other than by hearsay. Perhaps his sister wanted to spare them what was possibly only a small grief, for they were really suffering quite enough already.

What sorts of excuses people had used on that first morning to get the doctor and the locksmith out of the house Gregor was completely unable to ascertain. Since they could not understand him, no one, not even his sister, thought that he might be able to understand others, and thus, when his sister was in her room, he had to be content with listening now and then to her sighs and invocations to the saints.<sup>2</sup> Only later, when she had grown somewhat accustomed to everything—naturally there could never be any talk of her growing completely accustomed to it—Gregor sometimes caught a comment that was intended to be friendly or could be interpreted as such. “Well, today it tasted good to him,” she said, if Gregor had really cleaned up what he had to eat; whereas, in the reverse situation, which gradually repeated itself more and more frequently, she used to say sadly, “No, everything has stopped again.”

But while Gregor could get no new information directly, he did hear a good deal from the room next door, and as soon as he heard voices, he scurried right away to the appropriate door and pressed his entire body against it. In the early days especially, there was no conversation that was not concerned with him in some way or other, even if only in secret. For two days at all mealtime discussions on that subject could be heard on how people should now behave; but they also talked about the same subject in the times between meals, for there were always at least two family members at home, since no one really wanted to remain in the house alone and people could not under any circumstances leave the apartment completely empty. In addition, on the very first day the servant girl—it was not completely clear what and how much she knew about what had happened—on her knees had begged his mother to let her go immediately, and when she said goodbye about fifteen minutes later, she thanked them for the dismissal with tears in her eyes, as if she was receiving the greatest favor that people had shown her there, and, without anyone demanding it from her, she swore a fearful oath not to betray anyone, not even the slightest bit.

Now his sister had to team up with his mother to do the cooking, although that didn't create much trouble because people were eating almost nothing. Again and again Gregor listened as one of them vainly invited another one to eat and received no answer other than “Thank you. I've had enough” or something like that. And perhaps they had stopped having anything to drink, too. His sister often asked his father whether he wanted to have a beer and gladly offered to fetch it herself, and when

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