

THE METAMORPHOSIS

The Metamorphosis

A Mark Scribe Signature Edition

FRANZ KAFKA

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A NOTE ON THIS TRANSLATION

This is a Mark Scribe Signature translation, made by machine, working straight from Kafka's original German text of 1915 (the Kurt Wolff edition), with oversight from an editor. The method was simple. The German was translated in a single pass with directions to keep the language plain, soften nothing, and never split or fuse a sentence where Kafka's structure runs longer than ordinary German, so that every one of Kafka's long, winding sentences arrives in English intact, where he made a point of it. Several more passes with different models looked for fidelity and word choice.

What you hold is Kafka's architecture in plain English, where words don't get in the way.

Mark Scribe, 2026

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As Gregor Samsa woke one morning from uneasy dreams, he found himself transformed in his bed into a monstrous vermin. He lay on his armour-hard back and saw, when he lifted his head a little, his arched, brown belly divided by bow-shaped stiffenings, on whose height the bedcover, ready to slide off entirely, could barely hold on. His many legs, pitifully thin compared to his usual bulk, flickered helplessly before his eyes.

“What has happened to me?” he thought. It was no dream. His room, a proper, only a little too small human room, lay quiet between the four well-known walls. Over the table, on which an unpacked sample collection of cloth goods was spread out—Samsa was a travelling salesman—hung the picture that he had recently cut out of an illustrated magazine and put in a pretty, gilded frame. It showed a lady who, fitted with a fur hat and a fur boa, sat upright and lifted toward the viewer a heavy fur muff in which her whole forearm had disappeared.

Gregor’s gaze then turned to the window, and the dreary weather—one heard raindrops striking the window’s metal ledge—made him quite melancholy. “How would it be if I slept a little further and forgot all this foolishness,” he thought, but that was entirely impossible, for he was used to sleeping on his right side but could not, in his present state, get into that position. With whatever force he threw himself onto his right side, he always rocked back into the back position. He tried it perhaps a hundred times, shut his eyes so as not to have to see the scrabbling legs, and only stopped when he began to feel in his side a slight, dull pain he had never felt before.

“Oh God,” he thought, “what a strenuous profession I have chosen! Day in, day out on the road. The business excitements are much greater than in

the actual business at home, and besides, I am burdened with this plague of travelling, the worries about train connections, the irregular, bad meals, an ever-changing, never lasting, never becoming warm human contact. The devil take it all!" He felt a slight itching up on his belly; pushed himself slowly on his back nearer to the bedpost, so as to lift his head better; found the itching spot, which was covered with nothing but little white dots that he could not make sense of; and wanted to touch the spot with one leg, but pulled it back at once, for at the contact cold shivers went through him.

He slid back into his earlier position. "This early getting up," he thought, "makes one quite stupid. A man must have his sleep. Other travellers live like harem women. When I, for instance, go back to the inn in the course of the morning to copy out the orders I have got, these gentlemen are only just sitting down to breakfast. I should try that with my boss; I would be thrown out on the spot. Who knows, anyway, whether that might not be very good for me. If I did not hold back for my parents' sake, I would have given notice long ago, I would have stepped up to the boss and told him my opinion from the bottom of my heart. He would have fallen off his desk! It is also a strange way to sit on the desk and speak down from on high to the employee, who moreover, because the boss is hard of hearing, must come up very close. Well, hope is not yet entirely given up; once I have the money together to pay off the parents' debt to him—it should take another five or six years—I will do the thing for certain. Then the big cut will be made. For now, though, I must get up, for my train leaves at five."

And he looked over at the alarm clock that ticked on the chest. "Heavenly Father!" he thought. It was half past six, and the hands were moving quietly forward, it was even past the half, it was already nearing a quarter to. Had the alarm not rung? One saw from the bed that it was correctly set for four o'clock; surely it had rung too. Yes, but was it possible to sleep quietly through this furniture-shaking ringing? Well, he had not slept quietly, but probably all the more deeply. But what was he to do now? The next train went at seven o'clock; to catch that one, he would have to

hurry insanely, and the sample collection was not yet packed, and he himself felt not at all especially fresh and mobile. And even if he caught the train, a thunderstorm from the boss was unavoidable, for the errand boy had waited at the five o'clock train and had long since reported his absence. He was a creature of the boss, spineless and witless. What if he reported himself sick? But that would be extremely awkward and suspicious, for Gregor had not once been sick during his five years of service. Certainly the boss would come with the health insurance doctor, would reproach the parents for their lazy son and cut off all objections by pointing to the health insurance doctor, for whom there are, after all, only perfectly healthy but work-shy people. And would he, by the way, be so entirely wrong in this case? Gregor actually felt, apart from a drowsiness that was really superfluous after the long sleep, quite well and even had an especially strong hunger.

As he thought all this over in greatest haste, unable to make up his mind to leave the bed—just then the alarm clock struck a quarter to seven—there was a cautious knock at the door at the head of his bed. “Gregor,” a voice called—it was his mother—, “it is a quarter to seven. Did you not want to leave?” The gentle voice! Gregor was startled when he heard his answering voice, which was unmistakably his old one, but into which, as if from below, an irrepressible, painful squeaking mixed, which left the words properly clear only in the first moment, only to destroy them in the echo so that one did not know if one had heard rightly. Gregor had wanted to answer in detail and explain everything, but in these circumstances he confined himself to saying: “Yes, yes, thank you, Mother, I am just getting up.” Because of the wooden door, the change in Gregor’s voice was probably not noticeable outside, for his mother was reassured by this explanation and shuffled away. But through this little exchange the other family members had become aware that Gregor, contrary to expectation, was still at home, and already the father was knocking at one side door, weakly but with his fist. “Gregor, Gregor,” he called, “what is it then?” And after a little while he admonished him again in a deeper voice: “Gregor! Gregor!” At the

other side door, however, the sister lamented softly: "Gregor? Are you not well? Do you need something?" To both sides Gregor answered: "I am ready now," and tried, by the most careful pronunciation and by inserting long pauses between the individual words, to take everything conspicuous out of his voice. The father went back to his breakfast too, but the sister whispered: "Gregor, open up, I beg you." Gregor, however, had no thought of opening up, but praised the caution, adopted from his travels, of locking all doors during the night even at home.

At 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, as he well realized, in bed he would never reach a sensible end with his thinking. He remembered having often felt some slight pain in bed, perhaps caused by lying awkwardly, which then turned out to be pure imagination upon rising, and he was curious to see how his present notions would gradually dissolve. That the change in his voice was nothing other than the harbinger of a real chill, an occupational illness of traveling salesmen, he did not doubt in the slightest.

Throwing off the cover was quite simple; he only had to puff himself up a little and it fell off by itself. But further on it became difficult, especially because he was so extraordinarily wide. He would have needed arms and hands to push himself upright; instead, however, he had only the many little legs, which were ceaselessly in the most varied motion and which, moreover, he could not control. If he wanted to bend one of them once, it was the first thing that it stretched itself out; and if he finally succeeded in making this leg do what he wanted, all the others meanwhile worked away, as if set free, in the highest, painful excitement. "Only not to stay uselessly in bed," Gregor said to himself.

First he wanted to get out of bed with the lower part of his body, but this lower part, which he had not yet seen, by the way, and of which he could form no clear idea, proved too hard to move; it went so slowly; and when at last, almost frantic, with gathered strength, without care he thrust himself forward, he had chosen the wrong direction, struck hard against

the lower bedpost, and the burning pain he felt taught him that just the lower part of his body was perhaps the most sensitive at the moment.

He therefore tried to get the upper body out of bed first and carefully turned his head toward the edge of the bed. This succeeded easily too, and despite its breadth and weight the mass of his body finally followed the turning of the head slowly. But when he finally held his head outside the bed in the free air, he grew afraid of advancing further in this way, for if he finally let himself fall like this, a miracle would have to happen if his head were not to be injured. And consciousness he must not lose now at any price; he would rather stay in bed.

But when, after the same effort, sighing, he lay again as before, and again saw his little legs fighting one another even worse, if possible, and found no way to bring calm and order into this arbitrariness, he told himself again that he could not possibly stay in bed and that the most sensible thing was to sacrifice everything if only the smallest hope existed of freeing himself from the bed. At the same time, however, he did not forget to remind himself now and then that calm and calmest reflection was far better than desperate decisions. At such moments he fixed his eyes as sharply as possible on the window, but unfortunately little confidence and cheer could be drawn from the sight of the morning fog, which even hid the other side of the narrow street. "Already seven o'clock," he said to himself at the renewed striking of the alarm clock, "already seven o'clock and still such a fog." And for a little while he lay quietly with weak breath, as if he expected perhaps from the complete stillness the return of the real and self-evident conditions.

But then he said to himself: "Before it strikes a quarter past seven, I must absolutely have left the bed completely. Besides, by then someone from the office will come to ask about me, for the office opens before seven o'clock." And he now set about rocking his body in its full length completely evenly out of the bed. If he let himself fall out of bed in this way, his head, which he intended to lift sharply during the fall, would presumably remain uninjured. The back seemed to be hard; nothing would

probably happen to it upon falling onto the carpet. The greatest concern was the consideration of the loud crash there would have to be and which would probably arouse, if not terror, then at least worry behind all the doors. But that had to be risked.

When Gregor was already half projecting out of the bed—the new method was more a game than an exertion, he always had only to rock in jolts—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 servant girl—would have been fully sufficient; they would only have had to push their arms under his arched back, peel him out of the bed like that, bend down with the load, and then only carefully allow him to accomplish the swing-over onto the floor, where the little legs would then hopefully acquire some sense. Now, quite apart from the fact that the doors were locked, should he really have called for help? Despite all his distress, he could not suppress a smile at this thought.

He had already gone so far that with stronger rocking he could hardly keep his balance, and very soon he would have to decide finally, for in five minutes it would be a quarter past seven—when the doorbell rang at the apartment door. “That is someone from the office,” he said to himself and almost froze, while his little legs danced only the more hurriedly. For a moment everything remained still. “They are not opening,” Gregor said to himself, caught up in some absurd hope. But then, of course, as always, the servant girl went with firm steps to the door and opened it. Gregor had only to hear the first word of greeting from the visitor and already knew who it was—the chief clerk himself. Why was Gregor alone condemned to serve in a firm where the slightest absence immediately aroused the greatest suspicion? Were all employees then one and all scoundrels, was there among them not one loyal, devoted person who, if he had only failed to make use of a few morning hours for the business, would be driven mad by pangs of conscience and be positively unable to leave his bed? Was it really not enough to send an apprentice to inquire—if indeed this questioning was necessary at all—did the chief clerk himself have to come,

and did it thereby have to be shown to the whole innocent family that the investigation of this suspicious matter could be entrusted only to the intellect of the chief clerk? And more as a result of the excitement into which Gregor was thrown by these reflections than as a result of a proper decision, he swung himself with all his might out of the bed. There was a loud thump, but it was not a real crash. The fall was softened a little by the carpet, and the back was more elastic than Gregor had thought, hence the not very striking dull sound. Only he had not held his head carefully enough and had struck it; he turned it and rubbed it on the carpet in anger and pain.

“Something has fallen in there,” said the chief clerk in the next room on the left. Gregor tried to imagine whether something similar to what had happened to him today might not also happen to the chief clerk one day; one really had to admit the possibility of it. But as if in rough answer 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 next room on the right the sister whispered to inform Gregor: “Gregor, the chief clerk is here.” “I know,” Gregor said to himself; but he did not dare to raise his voice so loud that the sister could have heard it.

“Gregor,” said his father now from the next room on the left, “the chief clerk has come and is asking why you did not leave on the early train. We don’t know what we should tell him. Besides, he also wants to speak with you personally. So please open the door. He will be kind enough to excuse the disorder in the room.” “Good morning, Mr. Samsa,” the chief clerk called out amiably in between. “He is not well,” said the mother to the chief clerk while the father was still talking at the door, “he is not well, believe me, Mr. Chief Clerk. How else would Gregor miss a train! The boy has nothing in his head but the business. It almost angers me that he never goes out in the evening; he was in the city now for eight days, but every evening he was at home. There he sits with us at the table and quietly reads the newspaper or studies train schedules. It is already a distraction for him when he occupies himself with fretwork. For instance, in the course of two

or three evenings he carved a little frame; you will be astonished how pretty it is; it is hanging in his room; you will see it at once when Gregor opens the door. I am happy, by the way, that you are here, Mr. Chief Clerk; we alone would not have gotten Gregor to open the door; he is so stubborn; and surely he is not well, even though he denied it this morning." "I am coming right away," said Gregor slowly and deliberately and did not stir, so as not to lose a word of the conversations. "Otherwise, madam, I cannot explain it either," said the chief clerk, "hopefully it is nothing serious. Though on the other hand I must say that we businessmen—as one wishes, unfortunately or fortunately—very often simply have to overcome a slight indisposition out of business considerations." "So can the chief clerk come in to you now?" asked the impatient father and knocked again at the door. "No," said Gregor. In the next room on the left a painful silence fell, in the next room on the right the sister began to sob.

Why did the sister not go to the others? She had probably only just now gotten out of bed and had not yet begun to get dressed. And why was she crying? Because he did not get up and did not let the chief clerk in, because he was in danger of losing his position and because then the boss would pursue the parents again with the old claims? But for the moment those were surely needless worries. Gregor was still here and did not think in the slightest of leaving his family. At the moment he was lying there on the carpet, and no one who had known his condition would seriously have demanded that he let the chief clerk in. But because of this small discourtesy, for which a suitable excuse could easily be found later, Gregor could not very well be sent away at once. And it seemed to Gregor that it would be much more sensible to leave him now in peace instead of disturbing him with crying and coaxing. But it was precisely the uncertainty that oppressed the others and excused their behavior.

"Mr. Samsa," the chief clerk now called with raised voice, "what is the matter? You barricade yourself there in your room, answer only with yes and no, cause your parents heavy, needless worries, and neglect—this only mentioned in passing—your business duties in a truly unheard-of manner. I

speak here in the name of your parents and your boss and ask you quite seriously for an immediate, clear explanation. I am astonished, I am astonished. I believed I knew you as a calm, reasonable person, and now you suddenly seem to want to begin parading strange whims. The boss did hint to me this morning at a possible explanation for your absence—it concerned the collections recently entrusted to you—but I truly almost gave my word of honor that this explanation could not be correct. Now, however, I see here your incomprehensible obstinacy and lose entirely any desire to put in even the slightest word for you. And your position is by no means the most secure. I originally had the intention of telling you all this in private, but since you let me waste my time here uselessly, I do not know why your esteemed parents should not also learn of it. Your performance lately has been very unsatisfactory; it is, of course, not the season for making special business, we recognize that; but a season for making no business does not exist at all, Mr. Samsa, must not exist.”

“But Mr. Chief Clerk,” cried Gregor beside himself and forgot everything else in his excitement, “I am opening up at once, this instant. A slight indisposition, a dizzy spell, prevented me from getting up. I am still lying in bed now. But now I am already quite fresh again. I am just climbing out of bed. Just a small moment of patience! It is not going as well yet as I thought. But I am already well. How such a thing can just overcome a person! Just yesterday evening I was perfectly well, my parents know it, or rather, already yesterday evening I had a small premonition. One should have been able to see it in me. Why did I not report it at the office! But one always thinks that one will get over the illness without staying home. Mr. Chief Clerk! Spare my parents! For all the reproaches you are now making to me there is no reason; no one has said a word of them to me. Perhaps you have not read the last orders I sent in. Besides, I am still taking the eight o'clock train on the trip, the few hours of rest have strengthened me. Do not let yourself be delayed, Mr. Chief Clerk; I will be at the office myself right away, and have the kindness to say that and to give my regards to the boss!”

And while Gregor hastily poured all this out and hardly knew what he was saying, he had easily, probably as a result of the practice already gained in bed, approached the chest and now tried to pull himself upright on it. He actually wanted to open the door, actually wanted to show himself and speak with the chief clerk; he was eager to learn what the others, who now so demanded to see him, would say at the sight of him. If they were frightened, then Gregor had no more responsibility and could be calm. But if they took everything calmly, then he too had no reason to get excited and could, if he hurried, actually be at the station by eight. At first he slipped a few times from the smooth chest, but finally he gave himself one last swing and stood upright; he paid no more attention at all to the pains in his lower body, much as they burned. Now he let himself fall against the backrest of a nearby chair, at whose edges he held fast with his little legs. But with that he had also gained command of himself and fell silent, for now he could listen to the chief clerk.

“Did you understand even a single word?” the chief clerk asked the parents, “surely he is not making fools of us?” “For God’s sake,” cried the mother already in tears, “perhaps he is gravely ill, and we are tormenting him. Grete! Grete!” she then screamed. “Mother?” called the sister from the other side. They communicated through Gregor’s room. “You must go at once for the doctor. Gregor is sick. Quick, fetch the doctor. Did you hear Gregor speak just now?” “That was an animal’s voice,” said the chief clerk, strikingly soft against the mother’s shouting. “Anna! Anna!” cried the father through the hall into the kitchen and clapped his hands, “get a locksmith this instant!” And already the two girls were running through the hall with rustling skirts — how had the sister dressed so quickly? — and tore the apartment door open. One did not even hear the door slam; they had probably left it open, as tends to happen in homes where a great misfortune has occurred.

But Gregor had grown much calmer. True, his words were no longer understood, although they had seemed clear enough to him, clearer than before, perhaps because his ear had grown used to them. But all the same,

people now believed that something was not quite right with him and were ready to help him. The confidence and assurance with which the first measures were taken did him good. He felt himself drawn back into the human circle and hoped from both, from the doctor and from the locksmith, without really distinguishing between them, for splendid and surprising 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, though he took care to do this very quietly, since possibly even this noise sounded different from a human cough, a thing he no longer dared to decide for himself. Meanwhile it had grown completely still in the next room. Perhaps the parents were sitting at the table with the chief clerk and whispering, perhaps all of them were leaning against the door and listening.

Slowly Gregor pushed himself with the chair toward the door, let go of it there, threw himself against the door, held himself upright against it — the balls of his little legs had a little bit of adhesive stuff — and rested there a moment from the exertion. But then he set about turning the key in the lock with his mouth. It seemed, unfortunately, that he had no actual teeth — with what was he to grip the key right away? — but his jaws were indeed very strong; with their help he actually got the key moving and paid no heed to the fact that he was undoubtedly injuring himself somehow, for a brown fluid came out of his mouth, ran over the key, and dripped onto the floor. “Just listen,” said the chief clerk in the next room, “he is turning the key.” That was a great encouragement for Gregor; but all of them should have called out to him, his father and mother too: “Come on, Gregor,” they should have called, “keep at it, right up against the lock!” And imagining that everyone was following his efforts with suspense, he bit into the key senselessly with all the strength he could muster. As the turning of the key progressed, he danced around the lock, held himself upright now only with his mouth, and as needed he hung onto the key or pressed it down again with the whole weight of his body. The brighter sound of the lock finally snapping back positively roused Gregor. Taking a deep breath he said to

himself: "So I did not need the locksmith after all," and laid his head on the handle to open the door completely.

Since he had to open the door this way, it was actually already quite wide open, and he himself still not visible. He first had to turn slowly around the one door wing, and very carefully at that, if he did not want to fall clumsily onto his back just before entering the room. He was still occupied with that difficult movement and had no time to pay attention to anything else, when he already heard the chief clerk let out a loud "Oh!" — it sounded like the wind rushing — and now he saw him too, how he, being the nearest to the door, pressed his hand against his open mouth and slowly backed away, as though an invisible force, steadily at work, were driving him off. The mother — despite the chief clerk's presence she stood here with her hair still undone from the night, sticking up on end — first looked at the father with folded hands, then took two steps toward Gregor and sank down amid her skirts spreading out all around her, her face sunk entirely onto her breast, not to be found. The father clenched his fist with a hostile expression, as if he wanted to push Gregor back into his room, then looked around uncertainly in the living room, then shaded his eyes with his hands and wept so that his powerful chest shook.

Gregor did not step into the room at all now, but leaned from inside against the firmly bolted door wing, so that only half of his body was visible, and above it his head, tilted sideways, with which he peered over at the others. It had meanwhile grown much brighter; clearly visible on the other side of the street stood a section of the endless, gray-black building opposite — it was a hospital — with its regular windows harshly breaking through the facade; the rain was still falling, but only in large drops, singly visible and literally also thrown singly down onto the earth. The breakfast dishes stood in lavish number on the table, for breakfast was the father's most important meal of the day, which he drew out for hours while reading various newspapers. Just on the wall opposite hung a photograph of Gregor from his army days, showing him as a lieutenant, his hand on his sword, smiling carefree, demanding respect for his bearing and uniform. The door

to the hall was open, and since the apartment door was open too, one could see out onto the landing of the apartment and the beginning of the stairs leading downward.

"Now," said Gregor and was well aware that he was the only one who had kept his composure, "I will get dressed right away, pack up the sample collection, and leave. Do you, do you want to let me leave? Now, Mr. Chief Clerk, you see, I am not stubborn and I like to work; traveling is arduous, but I could not live without traveling. Where are you going, then, Mr. Chief Clerk? To the office? Yes? Will you report everything truthfully? A person can be incapable of working at the moment, but that is precisely the right time to remember one's earlier achievements and to consider that later, after the obstacle is removed, one will certainly work all the more diligently and with more focus. I am indeed so very obliged to the boss, you know that quite well. On the other hand, I have the worry about my parents and my sister. I am in a tight spot, but I will work my way out of it again. Do not make it more difficult for me, though, than it already is. Take my side in the office! People do not like the traveling salesman, I know. They think he earns a fortune and leads a fine life. People simply have no particular reason to think this prejudice through more thoroughly. But you, Mr. Chief Clerk, you have a better overview of the circumstances than the rest of the staff, yes even, quite in confidence, a better overview than the boss himself, who in his capacity as an entrepreneur easily lets his judgment be swayed to the disadvantage of an employee. You also know very well that the traveling salesman, who is outside the office almost the whole year, can so easily become a victim of gossip, chance occurrences, and groundless complaints, against which it is utterly impossible for him to defend himself, since he mostly learns nothing of them at all and only then, when he has finished a trip exhausted, gets to feel the bad consequences at home on his own body, consequences whose causes can no longer be seen through. Mr. Chief Clerk, do not go away without having said a word to me that shows me you at least partly agree with me!"

But the chief clerk had already turned away at Gregor's first words, and only over his twitching shoulder did he look back at Gregor with pursed lips. And during Gregor's speech he did not stand still for a moment, but edged away, without taking his eyes off Gregor, toward the door, yet quite gradually, as though a secret ban existed on leaving the room. He was already in the hall, and after the sudden movement with which he drew his foot out of the living room for the last time, one could have believed he had just burned the sole of his foot. In the hall, however, he stretched his right hand far out toward the stairs, as if a truly otherworldly deliverance awaited him there.

Gregor realized that he must on no account let the chief clerk leave in this mood, if his position at the firm was not to be endangered to the utmost. The parents did not understand all this so well; over the long years they had formed the conviction that Gregor was provided for life in this firm, and besides, they now had so much to do with the present worries that all foresight had deserted them. But Gregor had this foresight. The chief clerk had to be detained, calmed, convinced, and finally won over; Gregor's future and his family's depended on it! If only his sister had been here! She was clever; she had already wept while Gregor still lay quietly on his back. And certainly the chief clerk, this friend of ladies, would have let himself be guided by her; she would have shut the apartment door and talked the fright out of him in the hall. But his sister was simply not there, Gregor himself had to act. And without thinking that he did not yet know his present abilities to move at all, without thinking either that his speech had possibly—indeed probably—again not been understood, he left the door wing; pushed himself through the opening; wanted to go over to the chief clerk, who was already holding on with both hands, ridiculously, to the railing of the landing; but immediately fell, searching for a hold, with a small cry onto his many little legs. Scarcely had this happened when he felt for the first time that morning a physical well-being; the little legs had firm ground beneath them; they obeyed perfectly, as he noted with joy; they even strove to carry him away wherever he wanted; and already he believed

that the final improvement of all suffering stood immediately at hand. But at the same moment as he lay there rocking with restrained movement, not at all far from his mother, directly opposite her on the floor, she, who had seemed so utterly sunk into herself, suddenly sprang up, her arms stretched wide, her fingers spread, cried: "Help, for God's sake help!", held her head tilted, as if she wanted to see Gregor better, but ran, in contradiction to this, senselessly backward; had forgotten that the set table stood behind her; sat down on it, when she reached it, as if distractedly, in haste, and seemed not to notice at all that beside her the coffee from the overturned large pot was pouring in a full stream onto the carpet.

"Mother, Mother," said Gregor softly and looked up at her. For a moment the chief clerk had slipped entirely from his mind; on the other hand Gregor could not resist snapping his jaws several times into the empty air at the sight of the flowing coffee. At that the mother cried out anew, fled from the table and fell into the arms of the father hurrying toward her. But Gregor now had no time for his parents; the chief clerk was already on the stairs; his chin on the railing, he looked back one last time. Gregor took a run-up to catch him as surely as possible; the chief clerk must have sensed something, for he made a leap over several steps and vanished; "Huh!" he still cried, though, it rang through the whole stairwell. Unfortunately this flight of the chief clerk now also seemed to throw the father, who until now had been relatively composed, completely into confusion, for instead of running after the chief clerk himself or at least not hindering Gregor in his pursuit, he seized with his right hand the chief clerk's stick, which the latter had left behind on a chair with his hat and overcoat, fetched with his left a large newspaper from the table, and set about, stamping his feet, driving Gregor back into his room by swinging the stick and the newspaper. No pleading of Gregor's helped, no pleading was even understood, he might turn his head as humbly as he liked, the father only stamped his feet harder. Across the room the mother, despite the cool weather, had thrown open a window, and leaning out she pressed her face far outside the window into her hands. A strong draft arose

between the street and the stairwell, the window curtains flew up, the newspapers on the table rustled, individual sheets blew across the floor. Relentlessly the father pressed forward and let out hissing sounds, like a savage. Now, however, Gregor had no practice at all in walking backward, 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 the father impatient with the time-consuming turning, and at every moment the deadly blow on the back or on the head threatened him from the stick in the father's hand. In the end, though, Gregor had no other choice, for he noticed with horror that in walking backward he could not even keep to a direction; and so he began, with constant fearful sidelong glances at the father, to turn around as quickly as possible, but in reality only very slowly. Perhaps the father noticed his good will, for he did not disturb him in this, but even directed the turning movement from afar here and there with the tip of his stick. If only that unbearable hissing of the father had not been there! Gregor lost his head completely over it. He was already almost entirely turned around when, still listening for this hissing, he even made a mistake and turned himself back a little. But when he was finally happily before the door opening with his head, it became clear that his body was too broad to get through without more ado. It did not, of course, remotely occur to the father in his present state to open the other door wing, for instance, to create a sufficient passage for Gregor. His fixed idea was merely that Gregor must get into his room as quickly as possible. Never would he have permitted the elaborate preparations either that Gregor needed to raise himself upright and perhaps get through the door that way. As if there were no obstacle, he now drove Gregor forward with particular noise; behind Gregor it already sounded no longer like the voice of just a single father; now there was truly no more joking, and Gregor forced himself—come what might—into the door. One side of his body lifted, he lay slanted in the door opening, one flank was rubbed completely raw, ugly spots remained on the white door, soon he was stuck fast and could no longer have moved on his own, the little legs on one side hung trembling up in the

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

2

Only in the evening twilight did Gregor wake from his heavy, faint-like sleep. He would certainly have woken not much later even without disturbance, for he felt sufficiently rested and slept out, yet it seemed to him as though a fleeting footstep and a careful closing of the door leading to the hall had waked him. The gleam of the electric streetlamp lay pale here and there on the ceiling and on the higher parts of the furniture, but down below where Gregor was it was dark. Slowly, still clumsily groping with his feelers, which he was only now learning to value, he pushed himself toward the door to see what had happened there. His left side seemed one single long, unpleasantly taut scar, and he had to positively limp on his two rows of legs. One little leg, by the way, had been badly hurt in the course of the morning's incidents—it was almost a wonder that only one had been hurt—and dragged along lifeless behind.

Only at the door did he notice what had actually lured him there; it had been the smell of something edible. For there stood a bowl filled with sweet milk in which small slices of white bread were swimming. He nearly laughed out of joy, for he was even hungrier than in the morning, and at once he dipped his head almost up to the eyes into the milk. But soon he drew it back again, disappointed; not only did eating give him trouble because of his touchy left side—and he could eat only when the whole body worked along, puffing—but the milk, which was otherwise his favorite drink and which his sister had surely put in here for that reason, did not taste good to him at all; indeed, he turned away from the bowl almost with revulsion and crawled 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 whereas at this time of day the father used to read aloud to the mother and sometimes to the sister, too, from his afternoon paper with

raised voice, now no sound was to be heard. Well, perhaps this reading aloud, of which his sister always told and wrote to him, had generally fallen out of practice lately. But all around it was so still, too, even though the apartment was certainly not empty. "What a quiet life the family was leading," Gregor said to himself, and as he stared rigidly into the dark ahead of him he felt a great pride that he had been able to provide his parents and his sister with such a life in such a fine apartment. But what if all the quiet, all the comfort, all the contentment should now come to an end in horror? So as not to lose himself in such thoughts, Gregor preferred to set himself in motion and crawled up and down the room.

Once during the long evening one side door was opened a tiny crack, and once the other, and quickly shut again; someone probably felt the need to come in but also had too many doubts. Gregor now stopped right by the living-room door, determined to somehow bring the hesitant visitor in or at least to find out who it was; but now the door was opened no more and Gregor waited in vain. Early on, when the doors were locked, all had wanted to come in to him; now, when he had opened one door and the others had evidently been opened during the day, no one came any more, and the keys were now also stuck in from the outside.

Only late at night was the light in the living room put out, and now it was easy to establish that the parents and the sister had stayed awake so long, for, as one could clearly hear, all three were now moving away on tiptoe. Now certainly no one would come in to Gregor until morning; so he had a long time to think undisturbed about how he should now arrange his life anew. But the high, empty room in which he was forced to lie flat on the floor frightened him, without his being able to discover the cause, for it was, after all, the room he had lived in for five years—and with a half-unconscious turn and not without a light shame he hurried under the sofa, where, although his back was a little pressed and although he could no longer lift his head, he at once felt very comfortable and only regretted that his body was too broad to be entirely housed under the sofa.

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

Already in the early morning, it was almost still night, Gregor had the chance to test the strength of his newly made decisions, for from the hall the sister, almost fully dressed, opened the door and looked in with tension. She did not find him at once, but when she noticed him under the sofa—God, he had to be somewhere, he could not have flown away—she was so frightened that, unable to control herself, she slammed the door shut again from outside. But as if she regretted her behavior, she opened the door again at once and came in on tiptoe, as if she were visiting someone gravely ill or even a stranger. Gregor had pushed his head forward to the very edge of the sofa and watched 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 sofa, throw himself at his sister's feet, and beg her for something good to eat. But the sister noticed at once with astonishment the still-full bowl, from which only a little milk had been spilled around the edges; she picked it up at once, not with her bare hands, to be sure, but with a rag, and carried it out. Gregor was extremely curious what she would bring as a replacement, and he formed the most varied ideas about it. But never could he have guessed what the 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, surrounded by solidified white sauce; a few raisins and almonds; a cheese that Gregor had declared inedible two days before; a dry piece of bread, a piece of bread spread with butter, and a piece of bread spread with butter and salted. In

addition to all this she also set down the bowl probably intended once and for all for Gregor, into which she had poured water. And out of delicacy, since she knew that Gregor would not eat in front of her, she hurried away and even turned the key, just so that Gregor might notice that he could make himself as comfortable as he liked. Gregor's little legs whirled as he now went to eat. His wounds, by the way, must also have healed completely; he felt no hindrance anymore, he marveled at it and thought of how more than a month ago he had cut his finger just a little with a knife, and how this wound had still hurt him enough the day before yesterday. "Should I now have less fine feeling?" he thought, and was already sucking greedily at the cheese, which had drawn him to it at once and emphatically before all the other foods. In quick succession and with 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 even dragged the things he wanted to eat a little way farther off. He had long since finished with everything and was lying lazily in the same spot when the sister slowly turned the key as a sign that he should withdraw. This startled him awake at once, even though he was already almost dozing, and he hurried back under the sofa. But it cost him great self-control to stay under the sofa even for the short time the sister was in the room, for from the plentiful meal his body had rounded out a little, and he could hardly breathe there in the narrow space. Under small choking fits, with eyes slightly bulging, he watched as the unsuspecting sister swept up not only the leftovers with a broom, but even the foods Gregor had not touched at all, as if these too were no longer usable, and as she hastily shook everything into a bucket, which she closed with a wooden lid, whereupon she carried everything out. Hardly had she turned around when Gregor pulled himself out from under the sofa and stretched and puffed himself up.

In this way Gregor now got his food every day, once in the morning, when the parents and the servant girl were still asleep, the second time after the general midday meal, for then the parents likewise slept a little

while longer, and the servant girl was sent away by the sister on some errand. Certainly they too did not want Gregor to starve, but perhaps they could not have endured learning about his eating other than by hearsay, perhaps the sister wanted to spare them even a possibly small sorrow, for in fact they were suffering just enough.

By what excuses the doctor and the locksmith had been gotten out of the apartment again on that first morning, Gregor could not find out at all, for since he was not understood, no one thought, not even the sister, that he could understand the others, and so, when the sister was in his room, he had to content himself with hearing only here and there her sighs and calls upon the saints. Only later, when she had grown somewhat accustomed to everything—of completely getting used to it there could of course never be any talk—did Gregor sometimes catch a remark that was meant kindly or could be so interpreted. “Today it tasted good to him, though,” she said when Gregor had thoroughly cleaned up under the food, while in the opposite case, which gradually repeated itself ever more often, she used to say almost sadly: “Now everything has been left standing again.”

But while Gregor could directly learn no news, he did overhear many things from the adjoining rooms, and wherever he once heard voices, he ran at once to the door in question and pressed himself against it with his whole body. Especially in the first days there was no conversation that did not, somehow, even if only in secret, deal with him. For two days at all mealtimes consultations could be heard about how one should now behave; but even between meals they talked about the same subject, for at least two family members were always at home, since no one probably wanted to stay home alone and one could by no means leave the apartment entirely. Also the servant girl had, on the very first day—it was not entirely clear what and how much she knew of the event—on bended knee begged the mother to dismiss her at once, and when a quarter of an hour later she took her leave, she thanked them for the dismissal with tears, as for the greatest kindness that had been shown her here, and gave, without anyone

demanding it of her, a terrible oath to betray not even the slightest thing to anyone.

Now the sister, together with the mother, had to do the cooking too; to be sure, that did not make much trouble, for they ate almost nothing. Again and again Gregor heard how one urged the other in vain to eat and got no other answer than: "Thank you, I have enough," or something similar. Perhaps nothing was drunk either. Often the sister asked the father whether he wanted beer, and she heartily offered to fetch it herself, and when the father was silent, she said, to take away every hesitation, that she could also send the janitor's wife for it, but then the father finally said a great "No," and nothing more was said of it.

Already in the course of the first day the father laid out the entire financial situation and prospects to both the mother and the sister. Now and then he stood up from the table and fetched from his little Wertheim safe, which he had saved from the collapse of his business five years before, some receipt or some memorandum book. One heard how he unlocked the complicated lock and, after taking out what he sought, locked it again. These explanations of the father were in part the first cheering thing Gregor had heard since his captivity. He had been of the opinion that not the slightest thing had remained to the father from that business, at least the father had told him nothing to the contrary, and Gregor, to be sure, had also not asked him about it. Gregor's only concern at that time had been to do everything possible to make the family forget as quickly as possible the business misfortune that had brought them all into complete hopelessness. And so at that time he had begun to work with quite special fire and had almost overnight turned from a small clerk into a traveling salesman, who naturally had entirely different opportunities for earning money, and whose work successes were immediately converted into cash in the form of commission, which could be laid on the table at home before the astonished and delighted family. Those had been fine times, and never afterward had they repeated themselves, at least not in that splendor, although Gregor later earned so much money that he was able to bear the

expenses of the whole family and did bear them. One had simply grown used to it, both the family and Gregor; one took the money gratefully, he delivered it gladly, but a special warmth would no longer arise. Only the sister had remained close to Gregor, and it was his secret plan to send her, who unlike Gregor loved music very much and could play the violin movingly, to the conservatory next year, without regard for the great costs that would cause, and which one would make up for in some other way. Often during Gregor's short stays in the city the conservatory was mentioned in conversations with the sister, but always only as a beautiful dream, whose realization was not to be thought of, and the parents did not even like to hear these innocent mentions; but Gregor thought of it very definitely and intended to declare it solemnly on Christmas Eve.

Such thoughts, in his present condition entirely useless, went through his head while he stood there upright clinging to the door and listening. Sometimes from sheer weariness he could no longer listen at all and let his head strike carelessly against the door, but held it fast again at once, for even the small noise he had caused with it had been heard next door and had made everyone fall silent. "What's he up to again," said the father after a while, evidently turning toward the door, and only then was the interrupted conversation gradually taken up again.

Gregor now learned sufficiently—for the father tended to repeat himself often in his explanations, partly because he himself had not occupied himself with these things for a long time, partly also because the mother did not understand everything the first time—that despite all misfortune a quite small sum of money from the old days was still there, which the untouched interest had allowed to grow a little in the meantime. Besides that, however, the money that Gregor had brought home each month—he had kept only a few gulden for himself—had not been completely used up and had accumulated into a small capital. Gregor, behind his door, nodded eagerly, pleased at this unexpected foresight and thrift. Actually he could have used these surplus funds to pay down more of the father's debt to the boss, and that day on which he could have gotten rid of

this post would have been far closer, but now it was undoubtedly better this way, as the father had arranged it.

Now this money, however, was not nearly enough to let the family live on the interest; it was perhaps enough to maintain the family for one, at most two years, no more. It was therefore merely a sum that one really ought not to touch, and that had to be put aside for an emergency; the money to live on, however, one had to earn. Now the father was, to be sure, a healthy but old man, who had not worked for five years already and in any case could not trust himself to do much; he had in these five years, which were the first vacation of his laborious and yet unsuccessful life, put on a great deal of fat and had thereby become quite sluggish. And the old mother, who suffered from asthma, for whom a walk through the apartment caused exertion, and who spent every second day on the sofa by the open window in breathing difficulties—was she now perhaps to earn money? And the sister, who was still a child at seventeen years, and whose way of living so far was so much to be granted to her, which had consisted of dressing nicely, sleeping long, helping out in the household, taking part in a few modest amusements, and above all playing the violin—was she to earn money? When talk turned to this necessity of earning money, Gregor always first let go of the door and threw himself onto the cool leather sofa beside the door, for he was quite hot with shame and sorrow.

Often he lay there through the whole long nights, slept not a moment, and only scraped on the leather for hours. Or he did not shrink from the great effort of pushing a chair to the window, then crawling up the windowsill and, braced in the chair, leaning against the window, evidently only in some memory of the liberating feeling that looking out the window had held for him earlier. For in fact from day to day he saw even the things only a little distance away ever more indistinctly; the hospital opposite, whose all too frequent sight he had earlier cursed, he could no longer make out at all, and if he had not known for certain that he lived in the quiet but entirely urban Charlottenstrasse, he could have believed he was looking out his window into a wasteland in which the gray sky and the gray earth

merged indistinguishably. Only twice had the attentive sister needed to see that the chair stood by the window, when she already each time, after she had tidied the room, pushed the chair exactly back to the window, and even from then on left the inner casement open.

If only Gregor could have spoken with the sister and thanked her for everything she had to do for him, he would have borne her services more easily; as it was, he suffered under them. The sister certainly sought to blur the awkwardness of the whole thing as much as possible, and the more time passed, the better she succeeded at it, of course, but Gregor too saw through everything much more exactly with time. Already her entrance was terrible for him. Hardly had she entered than she ran, without taking time to close the door, however much she otherwise took care to spare everyone the sight of Gregor's room, straight to the window and tore it open with hasty hands, as if she were almost suffocating, and stayed, even when it was ever so cold, a little while by the window and breathed deeply. With this running and noise she frightened Gregor twice a day; the whole time he trembled under the sofa and yet knew very well that she would certainly gladly have spared him that, if only it had been possible for her to stay in a room in which Gregor was with the window closed.

Once, it was probably already a month since Gregor's transformation, and there was surely no special reason any more for the sister to be astonished at Gregor's appearance, she came a little earlier than usual and found Gregor still as he was, motionless and set up truly to frighten one, looking out the window. It would not have been unexpected for Gregor if she had not entered, since he by his position prevented her from opening the window at once, but she not only did not enter, she even started back and shut the door; a stranger might straightaway have thought Gregor had lain in wait for her and had wanted to bite her. Gregor hid himself of course immediately under the sofa, but he had to wait till noon before the sister came again, and she seemed much more restless than usual. He recognized from this that the sight of him was still unbearable to her and must remain unbearable to her in the future too, and that she must indeed

overcome herself greatly not to run away from the sight even of the little part of his body with which he jutted out from under the sofa. To spare her even this sight, one day he carried on his back—he needed four hours for this work—the bedsheet onto the sofa and arranged it in such a way that he was now entirely covered, and that the sister, even if she bent down, could not see him. Had this bedsheet in her opinion not been necessary, then she could certainly have removed it, for that it could not belong to Gregor's pleasures to shut himself off so completely was clear enough, but she left the bedsheet just as it was, and Gregor even believed he had caught a grateful look when once he carefully lifted the bedsheet a little with his head to see how the sister received the new arrangement.

In the first fourteen days the parents could not bring themselves to come in to him, and he often heard how they fully acknowledged the sister's present work, whereas previously they had often been annoyed with the sister because she had appeared to them a somewhat useless girl. Now, however, both often waited, the father and the mother, in front of Gregor's room while the sister tidied up in there, and hardly had she come out than she had to recount quite exactly how it looked in the room, what Gregor had eaten, how he had behaved this time, and whether perhaps a little improvement was to be noticed. The mother, by the way, wanted relatively soon to visit Gregor, but the father and the sister held her back at first with reasonable grounds, to which Gregor listened very attentively and which he fully approved. Later, however, they had to hold her back by force, and when she then cried: "Let me go to Gregor, he is after all my unhappy son! Do you not understand then that I must go to him?" then Gregor thought that it would perhaps be good after all if the mother came in, not every day of course, but perhaps once a week; she understood everything after all much better than the sister, who in spite of all her courage was still only a child and in the last analysis had perhaps only out of childish recklessness taken on such a heavy task.

Gregor's wish to see the mother was soon fulfilled. During the day Gregor, out of consideration for his parents, did not want to show himself

at the window, but he could not crawl much on the few square meters of the floor either, lying still he endured with difficulty already during the night, eating soon gave him not the slightest pleasure any more, and so for distraction he took up the habit of crawling crisscross over walls and ceiling. He especially liked to hang up on the ceiling; it was quite different from lying on the floor; one breathed more freely; a light swinging went through the body, and in the almost happy absentmindedness in which Gregor found himself 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 quite differently in his power than before and did not injure himself even with such a great fall. The sister now immediately noticed the new entertainment Gregor had found for himself—he left behind after all here and there traces of his sticky stuff while crawling—and she then got it into her head to make crawling possible for Gregor in the greatest measure and to remove the furniture that hindered it, thus above all the chest and the writing desk. Now she was not in a position, however, to do this alone; the father she did not dare ask for help; the servant girl would certainly not have helped her, for this girl of about sixteen held out bravely it is true since the dismissal of the previous cook, but had asked for the privilege of being allowed to keep the kitchen locked without pause and of having to open it only on special summons; so nothing remained for the sister then but to fetch the mother once in the father's absence. With cries of excited joy the mother came too, but fell silent at the door of Gregor's room. First the sister looked of course to see whether everything in the room was in order; only then did she let the mother enter. Gregor had in greatest haste drawn the bedsheet still deeper and more into folds, the whole thing looked really only like a bedsheet thrown by chance over the sofa. Gregor also refrained this time from spying out from under the bedsheet; he renounced seeing the mother already this time, and was only glad that she had now come after all. "Just come, one doesn't see him," said the sister, and evidently she led the mother by the hand. Gregor now heard how the two weak women shifted the in any case heavy old chest from its place, and how

the sister constantly claimed the greatest part of the work for herself, without listening to the warnings of the mother, who feared that she would overexert herself. It lasted very long. After probably already a quarter hour's work the mother said one should rather leave the chest here, for firstly it was too heavy, they would not be finished before the father's arrival and with the chest in the middle of the room would bar every path for Gregor, but secondly it was after all not at all certain that Gregor was being done a favor by the removal of the furniture. To her the opposite seemed to be the case; the sight of the empty wall positively oppressed her heart; and why should not Gregor also have this feeling, since he was long accustomed to the room's furniture and would therefore feel forsaken in the empty room. "And is it not then so," the mother concluded very softly, as she generally almost whispered, as if she wanted to avoid Gregor, whose exact whereabouts she indeed did not know, hearing even the sound of the voice, for that he did not understand the words she was convinced, "and is it not so as if we showed by the removal of the furniture that we give up every hope of improvement and leave him ruthlessly to himself? I believe it would be best if we sought to keep the room exactly in the condition in which it was before, so that Gregor, when he returns to us again, finds everything unchanged and can forget the intervening time the more easily."

As he listened to these words of his mother Gregor realized that the lack of any direct human address, combined with the monotonous life in the midst of the family, must have confused his mind in the course of these two months, for otherwise he could not explain to himself that he could seriously have desired that his room be emptied. Did he really want to have the warm room, comfortably furnished with inherited furniture, transformed into a cave in which he would then of course be able to crawl undisturbed in all directions, but also with a simultaneous, rapid, complete forgetting of his human past? He was even now already close to forgetting, and only the mother's voice, unheard for so long, had shaken him awake. Nothing should be removed, everything must stay, he could not do without the good influences of the furniture on his condition; and if the furniture

hindered him from pursuing the senseless crawling about, then it was no harm, but a great advantage.

But the sister was unfortunately of a different opinion; she had grown accustomed, not entirely without justification, to presenting herself as a special expert in the discussion of Gregor's affairs before the parents, and so now too the mother's advice was for the sister reason enough to insist on the removal not only of the chest and the writing desk, which she had first thought of alone, but on the removal of all the furniture, with the exception of the indispensable sofa. It was of course not only childish defiance and the self-confidence so unexpectedly and laboriously acquired in recent times that determined her to this demand; she had also actually observed that Gregor needed much space for crawling, whereas the furniture, as far as one could see, he did not use in the slightest. Perhaps, however, the sentimental sense of girls her age also played a part, which seeks its satisfaction at every opportunity, and by which Grete now let herself be tempted to want to make Gregor's situation even more terrifying, in order then to be able to do even more for him than hitherto. For into a room in which Gregor all alone ruled the empty walls, probably no human being except Grete would ever dare to enter.

And so she would not let herself be dissuaded from her decision by the mother, who in this room too seemed uncertain from sheer agitation, soon fell silent and helped the sister with all her strength in carrying out the chest. Well, the chest Gregor could in case of need still do without, but the writing desk already had to stay. And hardly had the women left the room with the chest, at which they pressed themselves groaning, when Gregor pushed his head out from under the sofa to see how he could intervene cautiously and as considerately as possible. But unfortunately it was just the mother who returned first, while Grete in the next room held the chest clasped and swung it alone back and forth, without of course moving it from the spot. The mother, however, was not accustomed to the sight of Gregor, he could have made her ill, and so Gregor hurried in fright, running backward to the other end of the sofa, but could no longer prevent

the bedsheet from moving a little in front. That was enough to make the mother attentive. She faltered, stood still 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, yet, as he soon had to admit to himself, this going back and forth of the women, their little calls, the scraping of the furniture on the floor affected him like a great tumult fed from all sides, and he had to, however tightly he drew head and legs to himself and pressed his body to the floor, tell himself inevitably that he would not endure the whole thing much longer. They were emptying his room; taking from him everything that was dear to him; the chest in which the fretsaw and other tools lay they had already carried out; were now loosening the writing desk already firmly embedded in the floor, at which he had written his assignments as a commercial academy student, as a secondary school pupil, yes even already as a primary school pupil—then he really had no more time to test the good intentions of the two women, whose existence he had by the way almost forgotten, for from exhaustion they were already working silently, and one heard only the heavy shuffling of their feet.

And so he burst forth—the women were just leaning on the writing 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 he should save first, then he saw hanging conspicuously on the otherwise already empty wall the picture of the lady dressed in nothing but fur, crawled hastily up and pressed himself against the glass, which held him fast and did his hot belly good. At least this picture, which Gregor now completely covered, no one would now certainly take away. He twisted his head toward the door of the living room to observe the women on their return.

They had not allowed themselves much rest and were already coming again; Grete had laid her arm around the mother and almost carried her. “So what do we take now?” said Grete and looked around. Then her eyes met those of Gregor on the wall. Probably only because of the mother’s

presence did she keep her composure, bent her face to the mother to keep her from looking around, and said, though trembling and without thinking: "Come, shouldn't we rather go back into the living room for a moment?" Grete's intention was clear to Gregor, she wanted to bring the mother to safety and then chase him down from the wall. Well, she could try it after all! He sat on his picture and would not give it up. He would sooner jump in Grete's face.

But Grete's words had only made the mother really uneasy, she stepped to the side, caught sight of the enormous brown spot on the flowered wallpaper, cried out, before it actually came to her consciousness that what she saw was Gregor, with a shrieking, harsh voice: "Oh God, oh God!" and fell with outspread arms, as if giving up everything, over the sofa and did not stir. "You, Gregor!" cried the sister with raised fist and urgent looks. They were the first words since the transformation that she had addressed directly to him. She ran into the next room to fetch some kind of essence with which she could wake the mother from her faint; Gregor wanted to help too—there was still time to save the picture—; but he stuck fast to the glass and had to tear himself away by force; he then ran into the next room too, as if he could give the sister some advice, as in earlier times; but then had to stand idle behind her; while she rummaged among various little bottles, she was startled when she turned around; a bottle fell to the floor and broke; a splinter wounded Gregor in the face, some kind of caustic medicine flowed around him; Grete now took, without lingering longer, as many little bottles as she could hold, and ran with them in to the mother; she slammed the door shut with her foot. Gregor was now shut off from the mother, who through his fault was perhaps near death; the door he must not open, if he did not want to drive away the sister, who had to stay with the mother; he had now nothing to do but wait; and oppressed by self-reproaches and worry, he began to crawl, crawled over everything, walls, furniture and ceiling, and finally fell in his despair, when the whole room already began to spin around him, onto the middle of the big table.

A little while passed, Gregor lay limp, all around was still, perhaps that was a good sign. Then the doorbell rang. The servant girl was of course locked in her kitchen and Grete therefore had to go open the door. The father had come. "What has happened?" were his first words; Grete's appearance had probably told him everything. Grete answered in a muffled voice, she was clearly pressing her face to the father's chest: "Mother fainted, but she is already doing better. Gregor has broken out." "I expected it," said the father, "I always told you so, but you women won't listen." It was clear to Gregor that the father had taken Grete's all-too-short message badly and assumed that Gregor had committed some act of violence. Therefore Gregor had to try to calm the father now, for he had neither time nor opportunity to explain things to him. And so he fled to the door of his room and pressed himself against it, so that the father upon entering from the hall could see at once that Gregor had the best intention of returning immediately to his room, and that it was not necessary to drive him back, but that one only needed to open the door and at once he would vanish.

But the father was not in the mood to notice such subtleties. "Ah!" he cried at once upon entering, in a tone as if he were at once furious and glad. Gregor drew his head back from the door and lifted it toward the father. Truly, he had not pictured the father like this, as he now stood there; admittedly, in recent times, with the newfangled crawling about, he had neglected to concern himself with the goings-on in the rest of the apartment as he used to, and should really have been prepared to encounter changed circumstances. And yet, and yet, was this still the father? The same man who lay buried in bed, tired, when Gregor had set out on a business trip in earlier days; who had received him on evenings of his return in his armchair, in his dressing gown; was not really capable of standing up, but had only raised his arms as a sign of joy, and who during the rare walks together on a few Sundays in the year and on the highest holidays, between Gregor and the mother, who already walked slowly in and of themselves, still walked a little more slowly, wrapped in his old coat, laboring forward with his cane always set down cautiously, and, when he wanted to say

something, almost always stood still and gathered his companions around him? But now he was standing quite erect; dressed in a tight blue uniform with gold buttons, such as servants of banking houses wear; above the high stiff collar of the coat his strong double chin developed; from under the bushy eyebrows the gaze of the black eyes shot out fresh and alert; the usually disheveled white hair was combed down into a painfully exact, gleaming center part. He threw his cap, on which a gold monogram, probably that of a bank, was mounted, in an arc across the whole room onto the sofa and, the ends of his long uniform coat thrown back, his hands in his trouser pockets, walked toward Gregor with a grim face. He probably did not know himself what he had in mind; at any rate he lifted his feet unusually high, and Gregor was astonished at the gigantic size of his boot soles. But he did not dwell on this, for he had known since the very first day of his new life that the father considered only the greatest severity appropriate toward him. And so he ran ahead of the father, stopped when the father stood still, and hurried forward again as soon as the father merely stirred. In this way they circled the room several times, without anything decisive occurring, indeed without the whole thing, because of its slow pace, even having the appearance of a pursuit. For this reason Gregor stayed on the floor for the time being, especially as he feared the father might take flight onto the walls or the ceiling for particular malice. Still, Gregor had to tell himself that he would not endure even this running for long, for while the father took one step, he had to carry out a countless number of movements. Shortness of breath was already beginning to make itself felt, since even in his earlier time he had not possessed wholly trustworthy lungs. As he now lurched along, gathering all his strength for the running, hardly keeping his eyes open; in his dullness thinking of no other escape than by running; and had almost already forgotten that the walls were open to him, which here, however, were blocked with carefully carved furniture full of points and spikes — just then something flew down close beside him, lightly thrown, and rolled along in front of him. It was an apple; at once a second flew after it; Gregor stood still in terror; further

running was useless, for the father had resolved to bombard him. From the fruit bowl on the sideboard he had filled his pockets and now threw, without aiming sharply for the moment, apple after apple. These little red apples rolled about on the floor as if electrified and bumped into one another. A weakly thrown apple grazed Gregor's back, but slid off harmlessly. One that flew after it immediately, however, literally penetrated Gregor's back; Gregor wanted to drag himself on, as if the surprising unbelievable pain could pass with a change of place; but he felt as if nailed fast and stretched himself out in complete confusion of all senses. Only with his last glance did he still see how the door of his room was torn open and the mother rushed out ahead of the screaming sister, in her chemise, for the sister had undressed her to give her freedom to breathe in her faint, how the mother then ran toward the father and on the way her unfastened skirts slipped one after another to the floor, and how she, stumbling over the skirts, pressed toward the father and, embracing him, in complete union with him — but now Gregor's sight failed — her hands at the back of the father's head, begged for Gregor's life to be spared.

3

Gregor's severe wound, from which he suffered for over a month—the apple remained sitting in his flesh as a visible keepsake, since no one dared to remove it—seemed to have reminded even the father that Gregor was, in spite of his present sad and disgusting shape, a member of the family whom one could not treat like an enemy, but toward whom it was the command of family duty to swallow one's revulsion and endure, nothing but endure.

And though Gregor had now probably lost his mobility forever through his wound and for the time being needed long, long minutes to cross his room like an old invalid—crawling up high was not to be thought of—he got, for this worsening of his condition, a replacement that in his opinion was completely sufficient, in that the living-room door, which he used to watch sharply an hour or two beforehand, was always opened toward evening, so that he, lying in the darkness of his room, invisible from the living room, could see the whole family at the lit table and could listen to their talk, in a manner of speaking with general permission, and so quite differently than before.

To be sure, these were no longer the lively conversations of earlier times, which Gregor had always thought of with some longing in the little hotel rooms when he had had to throw himself, tired, into the damp bedding. Now it was mostly very quiet. The father fell asleep in his armchair soon after supper; the mother and sister warned each other to be still; the mother, bent far forward into the light, sewed fine lingerie for a fashion shop; the sister, who had taken a job as a salesgirl, studied shorthand and French in the evening so as to perhaps reach a better post sometime later. Sometimes the father woke up, and as if he did not know at all that he had been asleep, said to the mother: "How long you've been

sewing again today!" and fell asleep again at once, while mother and sister smiled wearily at each other.

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

As soon as the clock struck ten, the mother tried to wake the father with soft words and then to persuade him to go to bed, for here it was not proper sleep and the father, who had to start his duty at six o'clock, needed that extremely. But in the stubbornness that had seized him since he became a servant, he always insisted on staying at the table longer, even though he regularly fell asleep, and what is more, could then be moved only with the greatest effort to exchange the armchair for the bed. However much mother and sister might press in on him with little admonishments, for quarter-hours at a time he slowly shook his head, kept his eyes shut, and did not get up. The mother plucked him by the sleeve, spoke flattering words into his ear, the sister left her task to help the mother, but with the father this had no effect. He only sank still deeper into his armchair. Not until the women took him under the armpits did he open his eyes, look from the mother to the sister and back, and was in the habit of saying: "This is a life. This is the peace of my old days." And leaning on the two women, he raised himself up, laboriously, as if he were the greatest burden to himself, let the women lead him to the door, waved them off there and now went on by himself, while the mother hastily threw down her sewing things and the sister her pen, in order to run after the father and be of further help to him.

Who in this worn-out and overtired family had time to care for Gregor more than was absolutely necessary? The household was cut back more and more; the servant girl was let go after all; a huge bony cleaning woman with white hair that fluttered around her head came mornings and evenings to do the heaviest work; everything else the mother took care of alongside her much sewing. It even happened that various pieces of the family jewelry, which the mother and sister had once worn overjoyed at gatherings and celebrations, were sold, as Gregor learned in the evening from the general discussion of the prices obtained. The greatest complaint, however, was always that one could not leave this apartment, which was far too large for the present circumstances, since it was unthinkable how one would move Gregor. But Gregor saw well enough that it was not only consideration for him that prevented a move, for he could easily have been transported in a suitable crate with a few air holes; what mainly held the family back from changing apartments was rather the complete hopelessness and the thought that they had been struck by a misfortune such as no one else in the whole circle of relatives and acquaintances. What the world demands of poor people they fulfilled to the utmost, the father fetched breakfast for the minor bank clerks, the mother sacrificed herself for the laundry of strangers, the 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 his back began to pain Gregor as if new when mother and sister, after they had brought the father to bed, now came back, let their work lie, drew close together, already sat cheek to cheek; when now the mother, pointing toward Gregor's room, said: "Close the door there, Grete," and when now Gregor was in the dark again while next door the women mingled their tears or even stared tearlessly at the table.

Gregor passed the nights and days almost wholly without sleep. Sometimes he thought about taking the family's affairs back into his own hands the next time the door opened, just as he had done before; in his thoughts there appeared again after a long time the boss and the chief clerk, the clerks and the apprentices, the so dim-witted house servant, two

or three friends from other businesses, a chambermaid from a hotel in the provinces, a fond, fleeting memory, a cashier from a hat shop whom he had courted seriously but too slowly—they all appeared mingled with strangers or people already forgotten, but instead of helping him and his family, they were all unapproachable, and he was glad when they vanished. But then again he was in no mood at all to worry about his family, only rage at the poor care filled him, and although he could imagine nothing for which he might have had an appetite, he still made plans for how he might get into the pantry to take what was, even when he had no hunger, after all due him. No longer thinking about what might give Gregor a special pleasure, the sister, before she ran off to the shop in the morning and at noon, hastily shoved some random food into Gregor's room with her foot, only to sweep it out again in the evening with a swing of the broom, indifferent to whether the food had perhaps only been tasted or—the most common case—was wholly untouched. The tidying of the room, which she now always took care of in the evening, could not have been done more quickly. Dirt streaks ran along the walls, here and there lay tangles of dust and filth. In the first days, at the sister's arrival Gregor would station himself in such particularly telling corners as to make, through this positioning, something of a reproach to her. But he could probably have stayed there for weeks without the sister's improving; she saw the dirt just as well as he did, but she had simply made up her mind to leave it. At the same time, with a sensitivity entirely new in her, which had taken hold of the whole family, she watched over the fact that the tidying of Gregor's room was reserved for her. Once the mother had subjected Gregor's room to a great cleaning, which succeeded only after using several buckets of water—the great dampness did indeed sicken Gregor too and he lay sprawled, embittered and motionless on the sofa—but the punishment for the mother did not fail to come. For hardly had the sister noticed the change in Gregor's room that evening when, deeply offended, she ran into the living room and, despite the mother's imploringly raised hands, broke into a fit of weeping that the parents—the father had of course been startled out of his armchair

—at first watched astonished and helpless; until they too began to stir; the father on the right reproached the mother for not leaving Gregor's room to the sister for cleaning; on the left, by contrast, he shouted at the sister that she would never again be allowed to clean Gregor's room; while the mother tried to drag the father, who no longer knew himself from agitation, into the bedroom; the sister, shaken by sobs, worked the table with her little fists; and Gregor hissed loudly with rage that it occurred to no one to close the door and spare him this sight and noise.

But even if the sister, exhausted from her professional work, had grown tired of caring for Gregor as before, the mother would by no means have had to take her place, and Gregor would not have had to be neglected. For now the cleaning woman was there. This old widow, who in her long life with the help of her strong bone structure had probably withstood the worst, had no real revulsion toward Gregor. Without being in any way curious, she had once by chance opened the door of Gregor's room and, at the sight of Gregor, who, entirely surprised, began to run back and forth though no one was chasing him, had stood there astonished, her hands folded in her lap. Since then she never failed to open the door a little, always briefly, morning and evening, and look in at Gregor. At first she also called him over to her with words she probably thought were friendly, such as "Come on over here, old dung beetle!" or "Look at the old dung beetle!" To such addresses Gregor answered with nothing, but stayed motionless in his place, as if the door had not been opened at all. If only they had given this cleaning woman the order to clean his room daily, instead of letting her uselessly disturb him as the mood took her! Once in the early morning—a hard rain, perhaps already a sign of the coming spring, beat against the windowpanes—Gregor was so embittered when the cleaning woman began with her phrases again that he turned toward her as if to attack, though slowly and feebly. But the cleaning woman, instead of being afraid, merely lifted a chair that stood near the door high in the air, and as she stood there with her mouth wide open, her intention was clear: to close her mouth only when the chair in her hand came crashing down on Gregor's back. "So, no

further then?" she asked, when Gregor turned around again, and set the chair quietly back in the corner.

Gregor now ate almost nothing at all. Only when he happened to pass by the food that had been set out did he take a bite into his mouth as a game, hold it there for hours, and then usually spit it out again. At first he thought it was sorrow over the state of his room that kept him from eating, but he very soon made his peace with the changes to the room. People had gotten into the habit of putting things that could not be stored elsewhere into this room, and there were now many such things, since one room of the apartment had been rented to three roomers. These serious gentlemen—all three had full beards, as Gregor once established through a crack in the door—were painstakingly concerned with order, not only in their room, but, since they had now rented here, in the whole household, thus especially in the kitchen. They tolerated no useless or even dirty junk. Moreover, they had for the most part brought their own furnishings. For this reason many things had become superfluous, things that were not sellable but that one also did not want to throw away. All of these migrated into Gregor's room. Likewise the ash can and the garbage can from the kitchen. Whatever was unusable at the moment was simply flung into Gregor's room by the cleaning woman, who was always in a great hurry; luckily Gregor usually saw only the object in question and the hand that held it. The cleaning woman perhaps had the intention of fetching the things again when time and opportunity allowed or of throwing them all out at once, but in fact they stayed lying wherever they had landed from the first throw, unless Gregor wound his way through the junk and set it in motion, at first forced to because no other space was free for crawling, later with growing pleasure, although after such wanderings, tired to death and sad, he again did not stir for hours.

Since the roomers sometimes took their evening meal at home in the common living room, the living-room door stayed shut on some evenings, but Gregor gave up the opening of the door quite easily, for he had already failed to take advantage of many evenings when it was open, but instead,

without the family noticing, had lain in the darkest corner of his room. Once, however, the cleaning woman had left the door to the living room a little open, and it stayed open like that even when the roomers entered in the evening and the light was turned on. They sat down at the head of the table, where in earlier times the father, the mother, and Gregor had sat, unfolded their napkins, and took knife and fork in hand. At once the mother appeared in the doorway with a dish of meat and close behind her the sister with a dish of potatoes piled high. The food steamed with thick smoke. The roomers bent over the dishes set before them as if they wanted to test them before eating, and indeed the one who sat in the middle and seemed to count as an authority to the other two cut a piece of meat still on the dish, evidently to determine whether it was tender enough and whether it should perhaps be sent back to the kitchen. He was satisfied, and mother and sister, who had watched tensely, began to smile with relief.

The family itself ate in the kitchen. Nevertheless the father, before he went into the kitchen, came into this room and, with a single bow, cap in hand, made a circuit of the table. The roomers all rose and murmured something into their beards. When they were then alone, they ate in almost complete silence. It seemed strange to Gregor that out of all the many noises of eating one always heard their chewing teeth again and again, as if this were meant to show Gregor that one needed teeth to eat and that even the finest toothless jaws could accomplish nothing. "I do have an appetite," Gregor said to himself worriedly, "but not for these things. How these roomers nourish themselves, and I am perishing!"

On this very evening—Gregor could not remember having heard the violin during the whole time—it sounded from the kitchen. The roomers had already finished their supper, the middle one had pulled out a newspaper, given each of the other two a sheet, and now they read, leaning back and smoking. When the violin began to play, they grew attentive, rose, and went on tiptoe to the hall door, where they stood pressed together. They must have been heard from the kitchen, for the father called: "Is the playing perhaps unpleasant to the gentlemen? It can be stopped at once."

“On the contrary,” said the middle one of the gentlemen, “would the young lady not like to come in to us and play here in the room, where it is after all much more comfortable and cozy?” “Oh please,” cried the father, as if he were the violinist. The gentlemen stepped back into the room and waited. Soon the father came with the music stand, the mother with the sheet music, and the sister with the violin. The sister calmly prepared everything for playing; the parents, who had never rented rooms before and therefore exaggerated their politeness toward the roomers, did not even dare to sit on their own chairs; the father leaned against the door, his right hand stuck between two buttons of his closed livery jacket; the mother, however, was offered a chair by one of the gentlemen and sat, since she left the chair wherever the gentleman happened to have placed it, off to one side in a corner.

The sister began to play; father and mother, each from his side, attentively followed the movements of her hands. Gregor, drawn by the playing, had ventured a little farther forward and was already with his head in the living room. He was hardly surprised that he had lately taken so little consideration for others; earlier this consideration had been his pride. And yet just now he would have had more reason to hide, for because of the dust that lay everywhere in his room and flew about at the slightest movement, he too was completely covered with dust; threads, hairs, remnants of food he dragged along with him on his back and sides; his indifference to everything was far too great for him to lie on his back and scour himself on the carpet, as he had done several times during the day before. And despite this condition he had no shyness about advancing a little way on the spotless floor of the living room.

To be sure, no one paid any attention to him either. The family was entirely absorbed by the violin playing; the roomers, by contrast, who at first, hands in their trouser pockets, had stationed themselves much too close behind the sister’s music stand, so that they could all have seen the sheet music, which must certainly have disturbed the sister, soon drew back to the window with lowered heads and half-whispered talk, where they

remained, watched worriedly by the father. It now truly had the all-too-clear appearance that they had been disappointed in their assumption of hearing beautiful or entertaining violin playing, had had enough of the whole performance, and were letting their peace be disturbed only out of politeness. Especially the way they all blew the smoke of their cigars upward from nose and mouth suggested great nervousness. And yet the sister played so beautifully. Her face was tilted to one side, searchingly and sadly her eyes followed the lines of notes. Gregor crawled a little farther forward and held his head close to the floor so that he might possibly meet her eyes. Was he an animal, that music so moved him? It seemed to him as if the way to the longed-for unknown nourishment were showing itself to him. He was determined to push forward to the sister, pluck at her skirt, and thereby suggest to her that she might come into his room with her violin, for no one here rewarded the playing as he wanted to reward it. He would not let her out of his room again, at least not so long as he lived; his terrifying shape would for the first time become useful to him; he would be at all the doors of his room at once and hiss at the attackers; the sister, however, was not to be forced but was to stay with him willingly; she would sit beside him on the sofa, bend her ear down to him, and he would then confide to her that he had had the firm intention of sending her to the conservatory and that, if misfortune had not intervened, he would have told everyone this past Christmas—Christmas had surely already passed, had it not?—without caring about any objections. After this declaration the sister would burst into tears of emotion, and Gregor would raise himself up to her shoulder and kiss her neck, which she, since she had started going to the shop, wore bare without ribbon or collar.

“Mr. Samsa!” cried the middle gentleman to the father and, without wasting another word, pointed with his index finger at Gregor, who was slowly moving forward. The violin fell silent, the middle roomer first shook his head, smiling at his friends, and then looked down at Gregor again. The father seemed to think it more necessary, instead of driving Gregor away, to calm the roomers first, although these were not at all agitated and Gregor

seemed to entertain them more than the violin playing had. He hurried over to them and tried with outspread arms to push them into their room and at the same time to block their view of Gregor with his body. They now actually became a little angry; one no longer knew whether at the father's behavior or at the realization now dawning on them that they had, without knowing it, possessed a room neighbor such as Gregor. They demanded explanations from the father, raised their arms in turn, plucked restlessly at their beards, and retreated only slowly toward their room. Meanwhile the sister had overcome the lostness into which she had fallen after the suddenly broken-off playing; after she had held violin and bow for a time in her idly hanging hands and had continued to look at the sheet music as if she were still playing, she pulled herself together with a sudden movement, laid the instrument on the mother's lap—the mother, struggling for breath, her lungs working violently, was still sitting in her chair—and ran into the next room, which the roomers, under the father's urging, were now approaching more quickly. One could see how, under the sister's practiced hands, the blankets and pillows on the beds flew up and arranged themselves. Before the gentlemen had even reached the room, she was finished with the bed-making and slipped out. The father seemed once again so seized by his stubbornness that he forgot every respect he after all owed his tenants. He pushed and pushed, until already in the doorway of the room the middle gentleman stamped his foot thunderously and thereby brought the father to a halt. "I hereby declare," he said, raising his hand and seeking with his eyes the mother and the sister as well, "that in consideration of the disgusting conditions prevailing in this apartment and family"—here he spat briefly and decisively on the floor—"I am giving notice on my room this very moment. I will naturally also pay not the slightest thing for the days I have lived here; on the contrary, I will consider whether I shall not proceed against you with certain—believe me—very easily justified demands." He fell silent and looked straight ahead, as if he expected something. And indeed his two friends immediately chimed in

with the words: "We too give notice this very moment." Thereupon he grasped the door handle and shut the door with a crash.

The father groped his way with fumbling 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, as if it had lost all support, showed that he was not sleeping at all. Gregor had lain still the whole time on the spot where the roomers had caught him. The disappointment over the failure of his plan, but perhaps also the weakness caused by so much fasting, made it impossible for him to move. With a certain definiteness he already feared a general collapse about to break over him in the next moment, and waited. Not even the violin startled him when, slipping from the mother's trembling fingers, it fell from her lap and gave out a reverberating tone.

"Dear parents," said the sister and struck her hand on the table by way of introduction, "things cannot go on like this. If you perhaps do not see it, I do see it. I will not speak my brother's name before this monster, and so I say merely: we must try to get rid of it. We have tried what is humanly possible to care for it and to bear with it; I believe no one can make the slightest reproach against us."

"She is a thousand times right," said the father to himself. The mother, who still could not find enough breath, began to cough dully into her held-up hand with an insane expression in her eyes.

The sister hurried to the mother and held her forehead. The father seemed to have been brought to more definite thoughts by the sister's words; he had sat up straight, was playing with his servant's cap among the plates that still stood on the table from the roomers' supper, and glanced from time to time at the still Gregor.

"We must try to get rid of it," said the sister now exclusively to the father, for the mother heard nothing in her coughing, "it will be the death of both of you, I see it coming. When one must already work so hard, as we all do, one cannot bear this eternal torment at home on top of it. I can't go on either." And she burst into weeping so violently that her tears flowed

down onto the mother's face, from which she wiped them with mechanical hand movements.

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

The sister only shrugged her shoulders as a sign of the helplessness that had now seized her, during her weeping, in contrast to her earlier certainty.

"If he understood us," said the father, half as a question; the sister, in the midst of her weeping, shook her hand violently as a sign that this was not to be thought of.

"If he understood us," repeated the father, and by closing his eyes he took in the sister's conviction of the impossibility of this, "then perhaps an agreement with him would be possible. But as it is—"

"It has to go," cried the sister, "that is the only way, Father. You must just try to get rid of the idea that it is Gregor. That we believed it for so long, that is our real misfortune. But how can it be Gregor? If it were Gregor, he would long ago have seen that a living together of human beings with such an animal is not possible, and would have gone away of his own free will. We would then have no brother, but could go on living and honor his memory. As it is, though, this animal persecutes us, drives away the roomers, obviously wants to take over the whole apartment and make us sleep in the gutter. Just look, Father," she suddenly shrieked, "he's starting again!" And in a terror completely incomprehensible to Gregor, the sister even abandoned the mother, pushed herself literally away from her chair, as if she would rather sacrifice the mother than stay in Gregor's vicinity, and hurried behind the father, who, excited merely by her behavior, also stood up and half raised his arms in front of her as if to protect her.

But Gregor had not the slightest thought of wanting to frighten anyone, least of all his sister. He had merely begun to turn around in order to wander back into his room, and this indeed looked striking, since because of his suffering condition he had to help himself along with his head during the difficult turning motions, lifting it many times and knocking it against the floor. He stopped and looked around. His good intention seemed to

have been recognized; it had only been a momentary fright. Now they all looked at him silently and sadly. The mother lay in her chair, her legs stretched out and pressed together, her eyes almost closing from exhaustion; the father and the sister sat beside each other, the sister had laid her hand around the father's neck.

"Now perhaps I may turn around already," thought Gregor, and began his work again. He could not suppress the snorting of the effort and also had to rest now and then. Besides, no one was urging him on, it was all left to him. When he had completed the turn, he immediately began to wander straight back. He was astonished at the great distance that separated him from his room, and could not at all understand how, in his weak state, he had covered the same path a short time ago almost without noticing it. Constantly intent only on crawling quickly, he hardly paid attention to the fact that no word, no cry from his family disturbed him. Only when he was already in the doorway did he turn his head, not completely, for he felt his neck growing stiff, but still he saw that nothing behind him had changed, only the sister had stood up. His last glance grazed the mother, who was now completely asleep.

Scarcely was he inside his room when the door was hastily slammed shut, bolted, and barred. Gregor was so startled by the sudden noise behind him that his little legs buckled. It was the sister who had been in such a hurry. She had already been standing there upright and waiting, then she had sprung forward light-footedly, Gregor had not even heard her coming, and a "Finally!" she cried to the parents while she turned the key in the lock.

"And now?" Gregor asked himself and looked around in the darkness. He soon made the discovery that he could now no longer move at all. He was not surprised at this; rather it struck him as unnatural that he had actually been able to move about until now with these thin little legs. Otherwise he felt relatively comfortable. True, he had pains in his whole body, but it seemed to him as if they were gradually growing weaker and weaker and would finally vanish 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 emotion and love. His opinion that he must disappear was, if possible, even more decided than his sister's. In this state of empty and peaceful reflection he remained until the tower clock struck the third morning hour. He still lived to see the beginning of the general brightening outside the window. Then his head sank down completely without his will, and from his nostrils his last breath streamed weakly forth.

When the cleaning woman came early in the morning — out of sheer strength and haste she slammed all the doors so hard, however often one had asked her to avoid this, that from the moment of her arrival no quiet sleep was possible anywhere in the apartment —, she found nothing special at first during her usual brief visit to Gregor. She thought he lay so motionless on purpose and was playing the offended party; she credited him with every possible kind of sense. Because she happened to have the long broom in her hand, she tried to tickle Gregor with it from the doorway. When even that showed no success, she grew annoyed and poked Gregor a little, and only when she had shoved him from his place without any resistance did she become attentive. When she soon recognized the true state of affairs, she made big eyes, whistled to herself, but did not linger long, rather tore open the bedroom door and cried with a loud voice into the darkness: “Just take a look, it’s croaked; there it lies, completely and utterly croaked!”

The Samsa couple sat upright in the marriage bed and had to struggle to overcome the fright at the cleaning woman before they got around to grasping her report. But then Mr. and Mrs. Samsa, each on his own side, hastily climbed out of bed, Mr. Samsa threw the blanket over his shoulders, Mrs. Samsa emerged in only her nightgown; thus they stepped into Gregor's room. Meanwhile the living-room door had also opened, where Grete had been sleeping since the arrival of the roomers; she was fully dressed, as if she had not slept at all, and her pale face seemed to prove that too. “Dead?” said Mrs. Samsa and looked up questioningly at the cleaning woman,

although she could examine everything herself and even recognize it without examination. "I should say so," said the cleaning woman, and by way of proof she shoved Gregor's corpse with the broom a good piece sideways. Mrs. Samsa made a movement as if she wanted 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. He hasn't eaten anything for such a long time, after all. Just as the food came in, it went out again." Indeed, Gregor's body was completely flat and dry, one only really recognized this now, since it was no longer lifted by the little legs and nothing else distracted the eye.

"Come, Grete, in to us for a little while," said Mrs. Samsa with a melancholy smile, and Grete went, not without looking back at the corpse, behind the parents into the bedroom. The cleaning woman closed the door and opened the window fully. Despite the early morning, a touch of mildness was already mixed into the fresh air. It was already the end of March, after all.

Out of their room stepped the three roomers and looked around in astonishment for their breakfast; they had been forgotten. "Where is the breakfast?" asked the middle one of the gentlemen peevishly of the cleaning woman. But she laid her finger to her lips and then waved hastily and silently to the gentlemen to come into Gregor's room. They came, too, and then stood, their hands in the pockets of their somewhat worn little coats, around Gregor's corpse in the now already quite bright room.

Then the bedroom door opened, and Mr. Samsa appeared in his livery, on one arm his wife, on the other his daughter. All were a little tear-stained; Grete now and then pressed her face to her father's arm.

"Leave my apartment immediately!" said Mr. Samsa and pointed at the door, without letting the women go from his side. "How do you mean that?" said the middle one of the gentlemen, somewhat taken aback, and smiled sweetly. The two others held their hands behind their backs and rubbed them together without stopping, as if in joyful expectation of a big

quarrel that was bound to turn out in their favor. "I mean it exactly as I say it," answered Mr. Samsa and walked, in a line with his two companions, straight toward the roomer. The latter stood still at first and looked at the floor, as if things were arranging themselves into a new order inside his head. "Then we shall go," he said then and looked up at Mr. Samsa, as though, in a sudden humility overcoming him, he sought even for this decision a fresh permission. Mr. Samsa merely nodded to him several times curtly with wide eyes. Whereupon the gentleman actually went at once with long strides into the hall; his two friends had already been listening for a little while with quite still hands and now fairly hopped after him, as if in fear that Mr. Samsa might enter the hall before them and cut the connection with their leader. In the hall all three took their hats from the coatrack, pulled their canes from the cane holder, bowed mutely, and left the apartment. In a suspicion that proved, as it turned out, entirely groundless, Mr. Samsa stepped out onto the landing with the two women; leaning against the railing, they watched as the three gentlemen slowly but steadily descended the long staircase, vanishing at each floor at a certain bend of the stairwell and after a few moments emerging again; the farther down they got, the more the Samsa family's interest in them faded, and when a butcher's apprentice came climbing up toward them and then high above them with his tray on his head in a proud bearing, Mr. Samsa soon left the railing with the women, and all returned, as if relieved, to their apartment.

They decided to spend the day resting and taking 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 his management, Mrs. Samsa to her client, and Grete to her employer. While they were writing, the cleaning woman came in to say that she was leaving, for her morning work was finished. The three writers merely nodded at first without looking up; only when the cleaning woman still would not leave did they glance up crossly. "Well?" asked Mr. Samsa. The cleaning woman stood smiling in the doorway, as though she had great good fortune

to report to the family but would do so only if she were thoroughly questioned. The little ostrich feather on her hat, which had annoyed Mr. Samsa throughout her entire time in service, swayed lightly in all directions. "So what is it you actually want?" asked Mrs. Samsa, for whom the cleaning woman still had the most respect. "Yes," answered the cleaning woman and could not go on speaking at once for friendly laughter, "well, about how that stuff from next door is to be taken away, you needn't worry yourselves. It's already 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 begin describing everything in detail, fended this off decisively with an outstretched hand. Since she was not allowed to tell, she remembered the great hurry she was in, called out, plainly offended: "Bye-bye, all," whirled around wildly, and left the apartment with a terrible slamming of the door.

"This evening she'll be dismissed," said Mr. Samsa, but got no answer from either his wife or his daughter, for the cleaning woman seemed to have disturbed their hardly won calm once more. They rose, went to the window, and stayed there, holding each other close. Mr. Samsa turned in his armchair toward them and watched them quietly for a little while. Then he called: "Well, come here now. Let the old things be at last. And have a little consideration for me, too." At once the women followed him, hurried to him, caressed him, and quickly finished their letters.

Then all three left the apartment together, which they had not done for months, and took the electric tram out into the open air beyond the city. The car, in which they were the only passengers, was entirely filled with warm sunshine. Leaning back comfortably in their seats, they talked over the prospects for the future, and it turned out that these were, on closer inspection, by no means bad, for all three positions were—something they had not actually yet asked each other about—exceedingly favorable and especially promising for later on. The greatest immediate improvement in their situation would of course come easily from a change of apartment; they would now take a smaller and cheaper, but better situated and

altogether more practical apartment than the present one, which Gregor had chosen. While they were talking this way, it struck Mr. and Mrs. Samsa, at the sight of their ever livelier daughter, almost at the same moment, how in recent times, despite all the care that had made her cheeks pale, she had blossomed into a beautiful and buxom girl. Growing quieter and communicating almost unconsciously through glances, they thought that it would soon be time to look for a decent husband for her. And it seemed to them like a confirmation of their new dreams and good intentions when, at the end of their ride, the daughter was the first to rise and stretch her young body.