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Metamorphosis Essay

Help received: my dad

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Problems:

- Not taking out words
- Eloquence vs. clarity
- Reducing quote length
- Explaining enough but not too much
- Conclusions are hard

In Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, Gregor Samsa, a travelling salesman, is the sole provider for his family. One morning Gregor awakes to find he has transformed into a giant bug. As he can no longer work, his family must begin working to make up for his lost earnings. Gregor's metamorphosis into a bug reveals that self-sacrifice is a learned behavior.

Gregor feels obligated to support his family. Gregor works at a job which he abhors. He thinks, "If I didn't have to hold back for my parents' sake, I'd have given notice long ago — I'd have marched right up to him and given him a piece of my mind...as soon as I've saved up enough money to pay back what my parents owe him — another five or six years ought to be enough — I'll most definitely do just that" (4). Gregor wants to quit his job, but refuses to do so for the sake of his family. Though the debts of Gregor's parents are not his, Gregor is the one who feels responsible for paying them. He took his job after his family endured a financial crisis in order to provide for them. "All had grown accustomed to this arrangement, not just the family but Gregor as well; they gratefully accepted the money, and he was happy to provide it, but the exchange no longer felt particularly warm" (22). Gregor is successful at work and gives his family the money he earns. Initially, his family is thankful to him; however, as he continues to provide for them, his family takes his contributions for granted. Gregor never questions why no one else works, though they are capable. He works a job that he hates, while his family members lounge around the house and party.

Even after his transformation, Gregor's priority remains his family. When Gregor's manager arrives to find out where he is, Gregor's family fears he will lose his job. "[He] was still here, and abandoning his family was the farthest thing from his thoughts" (10). Gregor has turned into a bug, for reasons unknown to him. It would be natural for him to feel frightened or

panicked. The consequences of his metamorphosis should be his main concern; instead, he is consumed by thoughts of his family. Gregor's sister Grete is the least repulsed of his family members, but even she has to force herself not to run away at the sight of him. In order to hide his appearance from her, Gregor spends hours carrying a bedsheet to the settee. "If she considered the sheet unnecessary, she could have removed it, since it was clear enough that it could not possibly be considered a pleasure for Gregor to shut himself off so completely, but she left the sheet where it was, and Gregor even thought he glimpsed a grateful look" (25). Gregor puts himself in a position which is uncomfortable for him. Grete never asked for Gregor to hide, but he takes the initiative on his own. Gregor feels a duty to sacrifice his own comfort in order to make his sister more comfortable. Gregor prioritizes his family over himself.

Months after Gregor's transformation, Grete reveals her thoughts on the bug. "But how can it be Gregor? If it were Gregor, it would have realized a long time ago that it just isn't possible for human beings to live beside such a creature, and it would have gone away on its own" (42). She no longer believes the bug is her brother. For her, life with the bug is intolerable, and she wants to be rid of it. Gregor hears her comments and flees to his room. "He thought back on his family with tenderness and love. His opinion that he must by all means disappear was possibly even more emphatic than that of his sister" (43). Gregor loves his family. He understands that he is a burden to them and feels a responsibility to ease this burden. Gregor allows himself to die because he knows it will free his family from their burdens.

Gregor sacrifices his happiness, his job, his health, and eventually his life. He endures months of isolation and starvation while his family sacrifices almost nothing. When Gregor dies, his family takes time off of work to go on a trip to the countryside. The Samsas took advantage

of Gregor's selfless nature to allow them to live a life of luxury. They did not repay him for his actions or appreciate his sacrifices. Gregor's life was dedicated to his family, while his family viewed him merely as a means to an end. Despite his benevolent nature, Gregor dies, while his cold-hearted family lives comfortably. Those who take advantage of others can end up better off.