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Translated by David Wyllie.

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Metamorphosis

Franz Kafka

Translated by David Wyllie

I

One morning, when Gregor Samsa woke from troubled dreams, he found

himself transformed in his bed into a horrible vermin. He lay on

his armour-like back, and if he lifted his head a little he could

see his brown belly, slightly domed and divided by arches into stiff

sections. The bedding was hardly able to cover it and seemed ready

to slide off any moment. His many legs, pitifully thin compared

with the size of the rest of him, waved about helplessly as he

looked.

"What's happened to me?" he thought. It wasn't a dream. His room,

a proper human room although a little too small, lay peacefully

between its four familiar walls. A collection of textile samples

lay spread out on the table - Samsa was a travelling salesman - and

above it there hung a picture that he had recently cut out of an

illustrated magazine and housed in a nice, gilded frame. It showed

a lady fitted out with a fur hat and fur boa who sat upright,

raising a heavy fur muff that covered the whole of her lower arm

towards the viewer.

Gregor then turned to look out the window at the dull weather.

Drops of rain could be heard hitting the pane, which made him feel

quite sad. "How about if I sleep a little bit longer and forget all

this nonsense", he thought, but that was something he was unable to

do because he was used to sleeping on his right, and in his present

state couldn't get into that position. However hard he threw

himself onto his right, he always rolled back to where he was. He

must have tried it a hundred times, shut his eyes so that he

wouldn't have to look at the floundering legs, and only stopped when

he began to feel a mild, dull pain there that he had never felt

before.

"Oh, God", he thought, "what a strenuous career it is that I've

chosen! Travelling day in and day out. Doing business like this

takes much more effort than doing your own business at home, and on

top of that there's the curse of travelling, worries about making

train connections, bad and irregular food, contact with different

people all the time so that you can never get to know anyone or

become friendly with them. It can all go to Hell!" He felt a

slight itch up on his belly; pushed himself slowly up on his back

towards the headboard so that he could lift his head better; found

where the itch was, and saw that it was covered with lots of little

white spots which he didn't know what to make of; and when he tried

to feel the place with one of his legs he drew it quickly back

because as soon as he touched it he was overcome by a cold shudder.

He slid back into his former position. "Getting up early all the

time", he thought, "it makes you stupid. You've got to get enough

sleep. Other travelling salesmen live a life of luxury. For

instance, whenever I go back to the guest house during the morning

to copy out the contract, these gentlemen are always still sitting

there eating their breakfasts. I ought to just try that with my

boss; I'd get kicked out on the spot. But who knows, maybe that

would be the best thing for me. If I didn't have my parents to

think about I'd have given in my notice a long time ago, I'd have

gone up to the boss and told him just what I think, tell him

everything I would, let him know just what I feel. He'd fall right

off his desk! And it's a funny sort of business to be sitting up

there at your desk, talking down at your subordinates from up there,

especially when you have to go right up close because the boss is

hard of hearing. Well, there's still some hope; once I've got the

money together to pay off my parents' debt to him - another five or

six years I suppose - that's definitely what I'll do. That's when

I'll make the big change. First of all though, I've got to get up,

my train leaves at five."

And he looked over at the alarm clock, ticking on the chest of

drawers. "God in Heaven!" he thought. It was half past six and the

hands were quietly moving forwards, it was even later than half

past, more like quarter to seven. Had the alarm clock not rung? He

could see from the bed that it had been set for four o'clock as it

should have been; it certainly must have rung. Yes, but was it

possible to quietly sleep through that furniture-rattling noise?

True, he had not slept peacefully, but probably all the more deeply

because of that. What should he do now? The next train went at

seven; if he were to catch that he would have to rush like mad and

the collection of samples was still not packed, and he did not at

all feel particularly fresh and lively. And even if he did catch

the train he would not avoid his boss's anger as the office

assistant would have been there to see the five o'clock train go, he

would have put in his report about Gregor's not being there a long

time ago. The office assistant was the boss's man, spineless, and

with no understanding. What about if he reported sick? But that

would be extremely strained and suspicious as in fifteen years of

service Gregor had never once yet been ill. His boss would

certainly come round with the doctor from the medical insurance

company, accuse his parents of having a lazy son, and accept the

doctor's recommendation not to make any claim as the doctor believed

that no-one was ever ill but that many were workshy. And what's

more, would he have been entirely wrong in this case? Gregor did in

fact, apart from excessive sleepiness after sleeping for so long,

feel completely well and even felt much hungrier than usual.

He was still hurriedly thinking all this through, unable to decide

to get out of the bed, when the clock struck quarter to seven.

There was a cautious knock at the door near his head. "Gregor",

somebody called - it was his mother - "it's quarter to seven.

Didn't you want to go somewhere?" That gentle voice! Gregor was

shocked when he heard his own voice answering, it could hardly be

recognised as the voice he had had before. As if from deep inside

him, there was a painful and uncontrollable squeaking mixed in with

it, the words could be made out at first but then there was a sort

of echo which made them unclear, leaving the hearer unsure whether

he had heard properly or not. Gregor had wanted to give a full

answer and explain everything, but in the circumstances contented

himself with saying: "Yes, mother, yes, thank-you, I'm getting up

now." The change in Gregor's voice probably could not be noticed

outside through the wooden door, as his mother was satisfied with

this explanation and shuffled away. But this short conversation

made the other members of the family aware that Gregor, against

their expectations was still at home, and soon his father came

knocking at one of the side doors, gently, but with his fist.

"Gregor, Gregor", he called, "what's wrong?" And after a short

while he called again with a warning deepness in his voice: "Gregor!

Gregor!" At the other side door his sister came plaintively:

"Gregor? Aren't you well? Do you need anything?" Gregor answered to

both sides: "I'm ready, now", making an effort to remove all the

strangeness from his voice by enunciating very carefully and putting

long pauses between each, individual word. His father went back to

his breakfast, but his sister whispered: "Gregor, open the door, I

beg of you." Gregor, however, had no thought of opening the door,

and instead congratulated himself for his cautious habit, acquired

from his travelling, of locking all doors at night even when he was

at home.

The first thing he wanted to do was to get up in peace without being

disturbed, to get dressed, and most of all to have his breakfast.

Only then would he consider what to do next, as he was well aware

that he would not bring his thoughts to any sensible conclusions by

lying in bed. He remembered that he had often felt a slight pain in

bed, perhaps caused by lying awkwardly, but that had always turned

out to be pure imagination and he wondered how his imaginings would

slowly resolve themselves today. He did not have the slightest

doubt that the change in his voice was nothing more than the first

sign of a serious cold, which was an occupational hazard for

travelling salesmen.

It was a simple matter to throw off the covers; he only had to blow

himself up a little and they fell off by themselves. But it became

difficult after that, especially as he was so exceptionally broad.

He would have used his arms and his hands to push himself up; but

instead of them he only had all those little legs continuously

moving in different directions, and which he was moreover unable to

control. If he wanted to bend one of them, then that was the first

one that would stretch itself out; and if he finally managed to do

what he wanted with that leg, all the others seemed to be set free

and would move about painfully. "This is something that can't be

done in bed", Gregor said to himself, "so don't keep trying to do

it".

The first thing he wanted to do was get the lower part of his body

out of the bed, but he had never seen this lower part, and could not

imagine what it looked like; it turned out to be too hard to move;

it went so slowly; and finally, almost in a frenzy, when he

carelessly shoved himself forwards with all the force he could

gather, he chose the wrong direction, hit hard against the lower

bedpost, and learned from the burning pain he felt that the lower

part of his body might well, at present, be the most sensitive.

So then he tried to get the top part of his body out of the bed

first, carefully turning his head to the side. This he managed

quite easily, and despite its breadth and its weight, the bulk of

his body eventually followed slowly in the direction of the head.

But when he had at last got his head out of the bed and into the

fresh air it occurred to him that if he let himself fall it would be

a miracle if his head were not injured, so he became afraid to carry

on pushing himself forward the same way. And he could not knock

himself out now at any price; better to stay in bed than lose

consciousness.

It took just as much effort to get back to where he had been

earlier, but when he lay there sighing, and was once more watching

his legs as they struggled against each other even harder than

before, if that was possible, he could think of no way of bringing

peace and order to this chaos. He told himself once more that it

was not possible for him to stay in bed and that the most sensible

thing to do would be to get free of it in whatever way he could at

whatever sacrifice. At the same time, though, he did not forget to

remind himself that calm consideration was much better than rushing

to desperate conclusions. At times like this he would direct his

eyes to the window and look out as clearly as he could, but

unfortunately, even the other side of the narrow street was

enveloped in morning fog and the view had little confidence or cheer

to offer him. "Seven o'clock, already", he said to himself when the

clock struck again, "seven o'clock, and there's still a fog like

this." And he lay there quietly a while longer, breathing lightly

as if he perhaps expected the total stillness to bring things back

to their real and natural state.

But then he said to himself: "Before it strikes quarter past seven

I'll definitely have to have got properly out of bed. And by then

somebody will have come round from work to ask what's happened to me

as well, as they open up at work before seven o'clock." And so he

set himself to the task of swinging the entire length of his body

out of the bed all at the same time. If he succeeded in falling out

of bed in this way and kept his head raised as he did so he could

probably avoid injuring it. His back seemed to be quite hard, and

probably nothing would happen to it falling onto the carpet. His

main concern was for the loud noise he was bound to make, and which

even through all the doors would probably raise concern if not

alarm. But it was something that had to be risked.

When Gregor was already sticking half way out of the bed - the new

method was more of a game than an effort, all he had to do was rock

back and forth - it occurred to him how simple everything would be

if somebody came to help him. Two strong people - he had his father

and the maid in mind - would have been more than enough; they would

only have to push their arms under the dome of his back, peel him

away from the bed, bend down with the load and then be patient and

careful as he swang over onto the floor, where, hopefully, the

little legs would find a use. Should he really call for help

though, even apart from the fact that all the doors were locked?

Despite all the difficulty he was in, he could not suppress a smile

at this thought.

After a while he had already moved so far across that it would have

been hard for him to keep his balance if he rocked too hard. The

time was now ten past seven and he would have to make a final

decision very soon. Then there was a ring at the door of the flat.

"That'll be someone from work", he said to himself, and froze very

still, although his little legs only became all the more lively as

they danced around. For a moment everything remained quiet.

"They're not opening the door", Gregor said to himself, caught in

some nonsensical hope. But then of course, the maid's firm steps

went to the door as ever and opened it. Gregor only needed to hear

the visitor's first words of greeting and he knew who it was - the

chief clerk himself. Why did Gregor have to be the only one

condemned to work for a company where they immediately became highly

suspicious at the slightest shortcoming? Were all employees, every

one of them, louts, was there not one of them who was faithful and

devoted who would go so mad with pangs of conscience that he

couldn't get out of bed if he didn't spend at least a couple of

hours in the morning on company business? Was it really not enough

to let one of the trainees make enquiries - assuming enquiries were

even necessary - did the chief clerk have to come himself, and did

they have to show the whole, innocent family that this was so

suspicious that only the chief clerk could be trusted to have the

wisdom to investigate it? And more because these thoughts had made

him upset than through any proper decision, he swang himself with

all his force out of the bed. There was a loud thump, but it wasn't

really a loud noise. His fall was softened a little by the carpet,

and Gregor's back was also more elastic than he had thought, which

made the sound muffled and not too noticeable. He had not held his

head carefully enough, though, and hit it as he fell; annoyed and in

pain, he turned it and rubbed it against the carpet.

"Something's fallen down in there", said the chief clerk in the room

on the left. Gregor tried to imagine whether something of the sort

that had happened to him today could ever happen to the chief clerk

too; you had to concede that it was possible. But as if in gruff

reply to this question, the chief clerk's firm footsteps in his

highly polished boots could now be heard in the adjoining room.

From the room on his right, Gregor's sister whispered to him to let

him know: "Gregor, the chief clerk is here." "Yes, I know", said

Gregor to himself; but without daring to raise his voice loud enough

for his sister to hear him.

"Gregor", said his father now from the room to his left, "the chief

clerk has come round and wants to know why you didn't leave on the

early train. We don't know what to say to him. And anyway, he

wants to speak to you personally. So please open up this door. I'm

sure he'll be good enough to forgive the untidiness of your room."

Then the chief clerk called "Good morning, Mr. Samsa". "He isn't

well", said his mother to the chief clerk, while his father

continued to speak through the door. "He isn't well, please believe

me. Why else would Gregor have missed a train! The lad only ever

thinks about the business. It nearly makes me cross the way he

never goes out in the evenings; he's been in town for a week now but

stayed home every evening. He sits with us in the kitchen and just

reads the paper or studies train timetables. His idea of relaxation

is working with his fretsaw. He's made a little frame, for

instance, it only took him two or three evenings, you'll be amazed

how nice it is; it's hanging up in his room; you'll see it as soon

as Gregor opens the door. Anyway, I'm glad you're here; we wouldn't

have been able to get Gregor to open the door by ourselves; he's so

stubborn; and I'm sure he isn't well, he said this morning that he

is, but he isn't." "I'll be there in a moment", said Gregor slowly

and thoughtfully, but without moving so that he would not miss any

word of the conversation. "Well I can't think of any other way of

explaining it, Mrs. Samsa", said the chief clerk, "I hope it's

nothing serious. But on the other hand, I must say that if we

people in commerce ever become slightly unwell then, fortunately or

unfortunately as you like, we simply have to overcome it because of

business considerations." "Can the chief clerk come in to see you

now then?", asked his father impatiently, knocking at the door

again. "No", said Gregor. In the room on his right there followed

a painful silence; in the room on his left his sister began to cry.

So why did his sister not go and join the others? She had probably

only just got up and had not even begun to get dressed. And why was

she crying? Was it because he had not got up, and had not let the

chief clerk in, because he was in danger of losing his job and if

that happened his boss would once more pursue their parents with the

same demands as before? There was no need to worry about things like

that yet. Gregor was still there and had not the slightest

intention of abandoning his family. For the time being he just lay

there on the carpet, and no-one who knew the condition he was in

would seriously have expected him to let the chief clerk in. It was

only a minor discourtesy, and a suitable excuse could easily be

found for it later on, it was not something for which Gregor could

be sacked on the spot. And it seemed to Gregor much more sensible

to leave him now in peace instead of disturbing him with talking at

him and crying. But the others didn't know what was happening, they

were worried, that would excuse their behaviour.

The chief clerk now raised his voice, "Mr. Samsa", he called to him,

"what is wrong? You barricade yourself in your room, give us no more

than yes or no for an answer, you are causing serious and

unnecessary concern to your parents and you fail - and I mention

this just by the way - you fail to carry out your business duties in

a way that is quite unheard of. I'm speaking here on behalf of your

parents and of your employer, and really must request a clear and

immediate explanation. I am astonished, quite astonished. I

thought I knew you as a calm and sensible person, and now you

suddenly seem to be showing off with peculiar whims. This morning,

your employer did suggest a possible reason for your failure to

appear, it's true - it had to do with the money that was recently

entrusted to you - but I came near to giving him my word of honour

that that could not be the right explanation. But now that I see

your incomprehensible stubbornness I no longer feel any wish

whatsoever to intercede on your behalf. And nor is your position

all that secure. I had originally intended to say all this to you

in private, but since you cause me to waste my time here for no good

reason I don't see why your parents should not also learn of it.

Your turnover has been very unsatisfactory of late; I grant you that

it's not the time of year to do especially good business, we

recognise that; but there simply is no time of year to do no

business at all, Mr. Samsa, we cannot allow there to be."

"But Sir", called Gregor, beside himself and forgetting all else in

the excitement, "I'll open up immediately, just a moment. I'm

slightly unwell, an attack of dizziness, I haven't been able to get

up. I'm still in bed now. I'm quite fresh again now, though. I'm

just getting out of bed. Just a moment. Be patient! It's not quite

as easy as I'd thought. I'm quite alright now, though. It's

shocking, what can suddenly happen to a person! I was quite alright

last night, my parents know about it, perhaps better than me, I had

a small symptom of it last night already. They must have noticed

it. I don't know why I didn't let you know at work! But you always

think you can get over an illness without staying at home. Please,

don't make my parents suffer! There's no basis for any of the

accusations you're making; nobody's ever said a word to me about any

of these things. Maybe you haven't read the latest contracts I sent

in. I'll set off with the eight o'clock train, as well, these few

hours of rest have given me strength. You don't need to wait, sir;

I'll be in the office soon after you, and please be so good as to

tell that to the boss and recommend me to him!"

And while Gregor gushed out these words, hardly knowing what he was

saying, he made his way over to the chest of drawers - this was

easily done, probably because of the practise he had already had in

bed - where he now tried to get himself upright. He really did want

to open the door, really did want to let them see him and to speak

with the chief clerk; the others were being so insistent, and he was

curious to learn what they would say when they caught sight of him.

If they were shocked then it would no longer be Gregor's

responsibility and he could rest. If, however, they took everything

calmly he would still have no reason to be upset, and if he hurried

he really could be at the station for eight o'clock. The first few

times he tried to climb up on the smooth chest of drawers he just

slid down again, but he finally gave himself one last swing and

stood there upright; the lower part of his body was in serious pain

but he no longer gave any attention to it. Now he let himself fall

against the back of a nearby chair and held tightly to the edges of

it with his little legs. By now he had also calmed down, and kept

quiet so that he could listen to what the chief clerk was saying.

"Did you understand a word of all that?" the chief clerk asked his

parents, "surely he's not trying to make fools of us". "Oh, God!"

called his mother, who was already in tears, "he could be seriously

ill and we're making him suffer. Grete! Grete!" she then cried.

"Mother?" his sister called from the other side. They communicated

across Gregor's room. "You'll have to go for the doctor straight

away. Gregor is ill. Quick, get the doctor. Did you hear the way

Gregor spoke just now?" "That was the voice of an animal", said the

chief clerk, with a calmness that was in contrast with his mother's

screams. "Anna! Anna!" his father called into the kitchen through

the entrance hall, clapping his hands, "get a locksmith here, now!"

And the two girls, their skirts swishing, immediately ran out

through the hall, wrenching open the front door of the flat as they

went. How had his sister managed to get dressed so quickly? There

was no sound of the door banging shut again; they must have left it

open; people often do in homes where something awful has happened.

Gregor, in contrast, had become much calmer. So they couldn't

understand his words any more, although they seemed clear enough to

him, clearer than before - perhaps his ears had become used to the

sound. They had realised, though, that there was something wrong

with him, and were ready to help. The first response to his

situation had been confident and wise, and that made him feel

better. He felt that he had been drawn back in among people, and

from the doctor and the locksmith he expected great and surprising

achievements - although he did not really distinguish one from the

other. Whatever was said next would be crucial, so, in order to

make his voice as clear as possible, he coughed a little, but taking

care to do this not too loudly as even this might well sound

different from the way that a human coughs and he was no longer sure

he could judge this for himself. Meanwhile, it had become very

quiet in the next room. Perhaps his parents were sat at the table

whispering with the chief clerk, or perhaps they were all pressed

against the door and listening.

Gregor slowly pushed his way over to the door with the chair. Once

there he let go of it and threw himself onto the door, holding

himself upright against it using the adhesive on the tips of his

legs. He rested there a little while to recover from the effort

involved and then set himself to the task of turning the key in the

lock with his mouth. He seemed, unfortunately, to have no proper

teeth - how was he, then, to grasp the key? - but the lack of teeth

was, of course, made up for with a very strong jaw; using the jaw,

he really was able to start the key turning, ignoring the fact that

he must have been causing some kind of damage as a brown fluid came

from his mouth, flowed over the key and dripped onto the floor.

"Listen", said the chief clerk in the next room, "he's turning the

key." Gregor was greatly encouraged by this; but they all should

have been calling to him, his father and his mother too: "Well done,

Gregor", they should have cried, "keep at it, keep hold of the

lock!" And with the idea that they were all excitedly following his

efforts, he bit on the key with all his strength, paying no

attention to the pain he was causing himself. As the key turned

round he turned around the lock with it, only holding himself

upright with his mouth, and hung onto the key or pushed it down

again with the whole weight of his body as needed. The clear sound

of the lock as it snapped back was Gregor's sign that he could break

his concentration, and as he regained his breath he said to himself:

"So, I didn't need the locksmith after all". Then he lay his head on

the handle of the door to open it completely.

Because he had to open the door in this way, it was already wide

open before he could be seen. He had first to slowly turn himself

around one of the double doors, and he had to do it very carefully

if he did not want to fall flat on his back before entering the

room. He was still occupied with this difficult movement, unable to

pay attention to anything else, when he heard the chief clerk

exclaim a loud "Oh!", which sounded like the soughing of the wind.

Now he also saw him - he was the nearest to the door - his hand

pressed against his open mouth and slowly retreating as if driven by

a steady and invisible force. Gregor's mother, her hair still

dishevelled from bed despite the chief clerk's being there, looked

at his father. Then she unfolded her arms, took two steps forward

towards Gregor and sank down onto the floor into her skirts that

spread themselves out around her as her head disappeared down onto

her breast. His father looked hostile, and clenched his fists as if

wanting to knock Gregor back into his room. Then he looked

uncertainly round the living room, covered his eyes with his hands

and wept so that his powerful chest shook.

So Gregor did not go into the room, but leant against the inside of

the other door which was still held bolted in place. In this way

only half of his body could be seen, along with his head above it

which he leant over to one side as he peered out at the others.

Meanwhile the day had become much lighter; part of the endless,

grey-black building on the other side of the street - which was a

hospital - could be seen quite clearly with the austere and regular

line of windows piercing its facade; the rain was still

falling, now throwing down large, individual droplets which hit the

ground one at a time. The washing up from breakfast lay on the

table; there was so much of it because, for Gregor's father,

breakfast was the most important meal of the day and he would

stretch it out for several hours as he sat reading a number of

different newspapers. On the wall exactly opposite there was

photograph of Gregor when he was a lieutenant in the army, his sword

in his hand and a carefree smile on his face as he called forth

respect for his uniform and bearing. The door to the entrance hall

was open and as the front door of the flat was also open he could

see onto the landing and the stairs where they began their way down

below.

"Now, then", said Gregor, well aware that he was the only one to

have kept calm, "I'll get dressed straight away now, pack up my

samples and set off. Will you please just let me leave? You can

see", he said to the chief clerk, "that I'm not stubborn and I

like to do my job; being a commercial traveller is arduous but

without travelling I couldn't earn my living. So where are you

going, in to the office? Yes? Will you report everything accurately,

then? It's quite possible for someone to be temporarily unable to

work, but that's just the right time to remember what's been

achieved in the past and consider that later on, once the difficulty

has been removed, he will certainly work with all the more diligence

and concentration. You're well aware that I'm seriously in debt to

our employer as well as having to look after my parents and my

sister, so that I'm trapped in a difficult situation, but I will

work my way out of it again. Please don't make things any harder

for me than they are already, and don't take sides against me at the

office. I know that nobody likes the travellers. They think we

earn an enormous wage as well as having a soft time of it. That's

just prejudice but they have no particular reason to think better of

it. But you, sir, you have a better overview than the rest of the

staff, in fact, if I can say this in confidence, a better overview

than the boss himself - it's very easy for a businessman like him to

make mistakes about his employees and judge them more harshly than

he should. And you're also well aware that we travellers spend

almost the whole year away from the office, so that we can very

easily fall victim to gossip and chance and groundless complaints,

and it's almost impossible to defend yourself from that sort of

thing, we don't usually even hear about them, or if at all it's when

we arrive back home exhausted from a trip, and that's when we feel

the harmful effects of what's been going on without even knowing

what caused them. Please, don't go away, at least first say

something to show that you grant that I'm at least partly right!"

But the chief clerk had turned away as soon as Gregor had started to

speak, and, with protruding lips, only stared back at him over his

trembling shoulders as he left. He did not keep still for a moment

while Gregor was speaking, but moved steadily towards the door

without taking his eyes off him. He moved very gradually, as if

there had been some secret prohibition on leaving the room. It was

only when he had reached the entrance hall that he made a sudden

movement, drew his foot from the living room, and rushed forward in

a panic. In the hall, he stretched his right hand far out towards

the stairway as if out there, there were some supernatural force

waiting to save him.

Gregor realised that it was out of the question to let the chief

clerk go away in this mood if his position in the firm was not to be

put into extreme danger. That was something his parents did not

understand very well; over the years, they had become convinced that

this job would provide for Gregor for his entire life, and besides,

they had so much to worry about at present that they had lost sight

of any thought for the future. Gregor, though, did think about the

future. The chief clerk had to be held back, calmed down, convinced

and finally won over; the future of Gregor and his family depended

on it! If only his sister were here! She was clever; she was already

in tears while Gregor was still lying peacefully on his back. And

the chief clerk was a lover of women, surely she could persuade him;

she would close the front door in the entrance hall and talk him out

of his shocked state. But his sister was not there, Gregor would

have to do the job himself. And without considering that he still

was not familiar with how well he could move about in his present

state, or that his speech still might not - or probably would not -

be understood, he let go of the door; pushed himself through the

opening; tried to reach the chief clerk on the landing who,

ridiculously, was holding on to the banister with both hands; but

Gregor fell immediately over and, with a little scream as he sought

something to hold onto, landed on his numerous little legs. Hardly

had that happened than, for the first time that day, he began to

feel alright with his body; the little legs had the solid ground

under them; to his pleasure, they did exactly as he told them; they

were even making the effort to carry him where he wanted to go; and

he was soon believing that all his sorrows would soon be finally at

an end. He held back the urge to move but swayed from side to side

as he crouched there on the floor. His mother was not far away in

front of him and seemed, at first, quite engrossed in herself, but

then she suddenly jumped up with her arms outstretched and her

fingers spread shouting: "Help, for pity's sake, Help!" The way she

held her head suggested she wanted to see Gregor better, but the

unthinking way she was hurrying backwards showed that she did not;

she had forgotten that the table was behind her with all the

breakfast things on it; when she reached the table she sat quickly

down on it without knowing what she was doing; without even seeming

to notice that the coffee pot had been knocked over and a gush of

coffee was pouring down onto the carpet.

"Mother, mother", said Gregor gently, looking up at her. He had

completely forgotten the chief clerk for the moment, but could not

help himself snapping in the air with his jaws at the sight of the

flow of coffee. That set his mother screaming anew, she fled from

the table and into the arms of his father as he rushed towards her.

Gregor, though, had no time to spare for his parents now; the chief

clerk had already reached the stairs; with his chin on the banister,

he looked back for the last time. Gregor made a run for him; he

wanted to be sure of reaching him; the chief clerk must have

expected something, as he leapt down several steps at once and

disappeared; his shouts resounding all around the staircase. The

flight of the chief clerk seemed, unfortunately, to put Gregor's

father into a panic as well. Until then he had been relatively self

controlled, but now, instead of running after the chief clerk

himself, or at least not impeding Gregor as he ran after him,

Gregor's father seized the chief clerk's stick in his right hand

(the chief clerk had left it behind on a chair, along with his hat

and overcoat), picked up a large newspaper from the table with his

left, and used them to drive Gregor back into his room, stamping his

foot at him as he went. Gregor's appeals to his father were of no

help, his appeals were simply not understood, however much he humbly

turned his head his father merely stamped his foot all the harder.

Across the room, despite the chilly weather, Gregor's mother had

pulled open a window, leant far out of it and pressed her hands to

her face. A strong draught of air flew in from the street towards

the stairway, the curtains flew up, the newspapers on the table

fluttered and some of them were blown onto the floor. Nothing would

stop Gregor's father as he drove him back, making hissing noises at

him like a wild man. Gregor had never had any practice in moving

backwards and was only able to go very slowly. If Gregor had only

been allowed to turn round he would have been back in his room

straight away, but he was afraid that if he took the time to do that

his father would become impatient, and there was the threat of a

lethal blow to his back or head from the stick in his father's hand

any moment. Eventually, though, Gregor realised that he had no

choice as he saw, to his disgust, that he was quite incapable of

going backwards in a straight line; so he began, as quickly as

possible and with frequent anxious glances at his father, to turn

himself round. It went very slowly, but perhaps his father was able

to see his good intentions as he did nothing to hinder him, in fact

now and then he used the tip of his stick to give directions from a

distance as to which way to turn. If only his father would stop

that unbearable hissing! It was making Gregor quite confused. When

he had nearly finished turning round, still listening to that

hissing, he made a mistake and turned himself back a little the way

he had just come. He was pleased when he finally had his head in

front of the doorway, but then saw that it was too narrow, and his

body was too broad to get through it without further difficulty. In

his present mood, it obviously did not occur to his father to open

the other of the double doors so that Gregor would have enough space

to get through. He was merely fixed on the idea that Gregor should

be got back into his room as quickly as possible. Nor would he ever

have allowed Gregor the time to get himself upright as preparation

for getting through the doorway. What he did, making more noise

than ever, was to drive Gregor forwards all the harder as if there

had been nothing in the way; it sounded to Gregor as if there was

now more than one father behind him; it was not a pleasant

experience, and Gregor pushed himself into the doorway without

regard for what might happen. One side of his body lifted itself,

he lay at an angle in the doorway, one flank scraped on the white

door and was painfully injured, leaving vile brown flecks on it,

soon he was stuck fast and would not have been able to move at all

by himself, the little legs along one side hung quivering in the air

while those on the other side were pressed painfully against the

ground. Then his father gave him a hefty shove from behind which

released him from where he was held and sent him flying, and heavily

bleeding, deep into his room. The door was slammed shut with the

stick, then, finally, all was quiet.

II

It was not until it was getting dark that evening that Gregor awoke

from his deep and coma-like sleep. He would have woken soon

afterwards anyway even if he hadn't been disturbed, as he had had

enough sleep and felt fully rested. But he had the impression that

some hurried steps and the sound of the door leading into the front

room being carefully shut had woken him. The light from the

electric street lamps shone palely here and there onto the ceiling

and tops of the furniture, but down below, where Gregor was, it was

dark. He pushed himself over to the door, feeling his way clumsily

with his antennae - of which he was now beginning to learn the value

- in order to see what had been happening there. The whole of his

left side seemed like one, painfully stretched scar, and he limped

badly on his two rows of legs. One of the legs had been badly

injured in the events of that morning - it was nearly a miracle that

only one of them had been - and dragged along lifelessly.

It was only when he had reached the door that he realised what it

actually was that had drawn him over to it; it was the smell of

something to eat. By the door there was a dish filled with

sweetened milk with little pieces of white bread floating in it. He

was so pleased he almost laughed, as he was even hungrier than he

had been that morning, and immediately dipped his head into the

milk, nearly covering his eyes with it. But he soon drew his head

back again in disappointment; not only did the pain in his tender

left side make it difficult to eat the food - he was only able to

eat if his whole body worked together as a snuffling whole - but the

milk did not taste at all nice. Milk like this was normally his

favourite drink, and his sister had certainly left it there for him

because of that, but he turned, almost against his own will, away

from the dish and crawled back into the centre of the room.

Through the crack in the door, Gregor could see that the gas had

been lit in the living room. His father at this time would normally

be sat with his evening paper, reading it out in a loud voice to

Gregor's mother, and sometimes to his sister, but there was now not

a sound to be heard. Gregor's sister would often write and tell him

about this reading, but maybe his father had lost the habit in

recent times. It was so quiet all around too, even though there

must have been somebody in the flat. "What a quiet life it is the

family lead", said Gregor to himself, and, gazing into the darkness,

felt a great pride that he was able to provide a life like that in

such a nice home for his sister and parents. But what now, if all

this peace and wealth and comfort should come to a horrible and

frightening end? That was something that Gregor did not want to

think about too much, so he started to move about, crawling up and

down the room.

Once during that long evening, the door on one side of the room was

opened very slightly and hurriedly closed again; later on the door

on the other side did the same; it seemed that someone needed to

enter the room but thought better of it. Gregor went and waited

immediately by the door, resolved either to bring the timorous

visitor into the room in some way or at least to find out who it

was; but the door was opened no more that night and Gregor waited in

vain. The previous morning while the doors were locked everyone had

wanted to get in there to him, but now, now that he had opened up

one of the doors and the other had clearly been unlocked some time

during the day, no-one came, and the keys were in the other sides.

It was not until late at night that the gaslight in the living room

was put out, and now it was easy to see that his parents and sister had

stayed awake all that time, as they all could be distinctly heard as

they went away together on tip-toe. It was clear that no-one would

come into Gregor's room any more until morning; that gave him plenty

of time to think undisturbed about how he would have to re-arrange

his life. For some reason, the tall, empty room where he was forced

to remain made him feel uneasy as he lay there flat on the floor,

even though he had been living in it for five years. Hardly aware

of what he was doing other than a slight feeling of shame, he

hurried under the couch. It pressed down on his back a little, and

he was no longer able to lift his head, but he nonetheless felt

immediately at ease and his only regret was that his body was too

broad to get it all underneath.

He spent the whole night there. Some of the time he passed in a

light sleep, although he frequently woke from it in alarm because of

his hunger, and some of the time was spent in worries and vague

hopes which, however, always led to the same conclusion: for the

time being he must remain calm, he must show patience and the

greatest consideration so that his family could bear the

unpleasantness that he, in his present condition, was forced to

impose on them.

Gregor soon had the opportunity to test the strength of his

decisions, as early the next morning, almost before the night had

ended, his sister, nearly fully dressed, opened the door from the

front room and looked anxiously in. She did not see him straight

away, but when she did notice him under the couch - he had to be

somewhere, for God's sake, he couldn't have flown away - she was so

shocked that she lost control of herself and slammed the door shut

again from outside. But she seemed to regret her behaviour, as she

opened the door again straight away and came in on tip-toe as if

entering the room of someone seriously ill or even of a stranger.

Gregor had pushed his head forward, right to the edge of the couch,

and watched her. Would she notice that he had left the milk as it

was, realise that it was not from any lack of hunger and bring him

in some other food that was more suitable? If she didn't do it

herself he would rather go hungry than draw her attention to it,

although he did feel a terrible urge to rush forward from under the

couch, throw himself at his sister's feet and beg her for something

good to eat. However, his sister noticed the full dish immediately

and looked at it and the few drops of milk splashed around it with

some surprise. She immediately picked it up - using a rag,

not her bare hands - and carried it out. Gregor was extremely

curious as to what she would bring in its place, imagining the

wildest possibilities, but he never could have guessed what his

sister, in her goodness, actually did bring. In order to test his

taste, she brought him a whole selection of things, all spread out

on an old newspaper. There were old, half-rotten vegetables; bones

from the evening meal, covered in white sauce that had gone hard; a

few raisins and almonds; some cheese that Gregor had declared

inedible two days before; a dry roll and some bread spread with

butter and salt. As well as all that she had poured some water into

the dish, which had probably been permanently set aside for Gregor's

use, and placed it beside them. Then, out of consideration for

Gregor's feelings, as she knew that he would not eat in front of

her, she hurried out again and even turned the key in the lock so

that Gregor would know he could make things as comfortable for

himself as he liked. Gregor's little legs whirred, at last he could

eat. What's more, his injuries must already have completely healed

as he found no difficulty in moving. This amazed him, as more than

a month earlier he had cut his finger slightly with a knife, he

thought of how his finger had still hurt the day before yesterday.

"Am I less sensitive than I used to be, then?", he thought, and was

already sucking greedily at the cheese which had immediately, almost

compellingly, attracted him much more than the other foods on the

newspaper. Quickly one after another, his eyes watering with

pleasure, he consumed the cheese, the vegetables and the sauce; the

fresh foods, on the other hand, he didn't like at all, and even

dragged the things he did want to eat a little way away from them

because he couldn't stand the smell. Long after he had finished

eating and lay lethargic in the same place, his sister slowly turned

the key in the lock as a sign to him that he should withdraw. He

was immediately startled, although he had been half asleep, and he

hurried back under the couch. But he needed great self-control to

stay there even for the short time that his sister was in the room,

as eating so much food had rounded out his body a little and he

could hardly breathe in that narrow space. Half suffocating, he

watched with bulging eyes as his sister unselfconsciously took a

broom and swept up the left-overs, mixing them in with the food he

had not even touched at all as if it could not be used any more.

She quickly dropped it all into a bin, closed it with its wooden

lid, and carried everything out. She had hardly turned her back

before Gregor came out again from under the couch and stretched

himself.

This was how Gregor received his food each day now, once in the

morning while his parents and the maid were still asleep, and the

second time after everyone had eaten their meal at midday as his

parents would sleep for a little while then as well, and Gregor's

sister would send the maid away on some errand. Gregor's father and

mother certainly did not want him to starve either, but perhaps it

would have been more than they could stand to have any more

experience of his feeding than being told about it, and perhaps his

sister wanted to spare them what distress she could as they were

indeed suffering enough.

It was impossible for Gregor to find out what they had told the

doctor and the locksmith that first morning to get them out of the

flat. As nobody could understand him, nobody, not even his sister,

thought that he could understand them, so he had to be content to

hear his sister's sighs and appeals to the saints as she moved about

his room. It was only later, when she had become a little more used

to everything - there was, of course, no question of her ever

becoming fully used to the situation - that Gregor would sometimes

catch a friendly comment, or at least a comment that could be

construed as friendly. "He's enjoyed his dinner today", she might

say when he had diligently cleared away all the food left for him,

or if he left most of it, which slowly became more and more

frequent, she would often say, sadly, "now everything's just been

left there again".

Although Gregor wasn't able to hear any news directly he did listen

to much of what was said in the next rooms, and whenever he heard

anyone speaking he would scurry straight to the appropriate door and

press his whole body against it. There was seldom any conversation,

especially at first, that was not about him in some way, even if

only in secret. For two whole days, all the talk at every mealtime

was about what they should do now; but even between meals they spoke

about the same subject as there were always at least two members of

the family at home - nobody wanted to be at home by themselves and

it was out of the question to leave the flat entirely empty. And on

the very first day the maid had fallen to her knees and begged

Gregor's mother to let her go without delay. It was not very clear

how much she knew of what had happened but she left within a quarter

of an hour, tearfully thanking Gregor's mother for her dismissal as

if she had done her an enormous service. She even swore

emphatically not to tell anyone the slightest about what had

happened, even though no-one had asked that of her.

Now Gregor's sister also had to help his mother with the cooking;

although that was not so much bother as no-one ate very much.

Gregor often heard how one of them would unsuccessfully urge another

to eat, and receive no more answer than "no thanks, I've had enough"

or something similar. No-one drank very much either. His sister

would sometimes ask his father whether he would like a beer, hoping

for the chance to go and fetch it herself. When his father then

said nothing she would add, so that he would not feel selfish, that

she could send the housekeeper for it, but then his father would

close the matter with a big, loud "No", and no more would be said.

Even before the first day had come to an end, his father had

explained to Gregor's mother and sister what their finances and

prospects were. Now and then he stood up from the table and took

some receipt or document from the little cash box he had saved from

his business when it had collapsed five years earlier. Gregor heard

how he opened the complicated lock and then closed it again after he

had taken the item he wanted. What he heard his father say was some

of the first good news that Gregor heard since he had first been

incarcerated in his room. He had thought that nothing at all

remained from his father's business, at least he had never told him

anything different, and Gregor had never asked him about it anyway.

Their business misfortune had reduced the family to a state of total

despair, and Gregor's only concern at that time had been to arrange

things so that they could all forget about it as quickly as

possible. So then he started working especially hard, with a fiery

vigour that raised him from a junior salesman to a travelling

representative almost overnight, bringing with it the chance to earn

money in quite different ways. Gregor converted his success at work

straight into cash that he could lay on the table at home for the

benefit of his astonished and delighted family. They had been good

times and they had never come again, at least not with the same

splendour, even though Gregor had later earned so much that he was

in a position to bear the costs of the whole family, and did bear

them. They had even got used to it, both Gregor and the family,

they took the money with gratitude and he was glad to provide it,

although there was no longer much warm affection given in return.

Gregor only remained close to his sister now. Unlike him, she was

very fond of music and a gifted and expressive violinist, it was his

secret plan to send her to the conservatory next year even though it

would cause great expense that would have to be made up for in some

other way. During Gregor's short periods in town, conversation with

his sister would often turn to the conservatory but it was only ever

mentioned as a lovely dream that could never be realised. Their

parents did not like to hear this innocent talk, but Gregor thought

about it quite hard and decided he would let them know what he

planned with a grand announcement of it on Christmas day.

That was the sort of totally pointless thing that went through his

mind in his present state, pressed upright against the door and

listening. There were times when he simply became too tired to

continue listening, when his head would fall wearily against the

door and he would pull it up again with a start, as even the

slightest noise he caused would be heard next door and they would

all go silent. "What's that he's doing now", his father would say

after a while, clearly having gone over to the door, and only then

would the interrupted conversation slowly be taken up again.

When explaining things, his father repeated himself several times,

partly because it was a long time since he had been occupied with

these matters himself and partly because Gregor's mother did not

understand everything the first time. From these repeated explanations

Gregor learned, to his pleasure, that despite all their misfortunes

there was still some money available from the old days. It was not

a lot, but it had not been touched in the meantime and some interest

had accumulated. Besides that, they had not been using up all the

money that Gregor had been bringing home every month, keeping only a

little for himself, so that that, too, had been accumulating.

Behind the door, Gregor nodded with enthusiasm in his pleasure at

this unexpected thrift and caution. He could actually have used

this surplus money to reduce his father's debt to his boss, and the

day when he could have freed himself from that job would have come

much closer, but now it was certainly better the way his father had

done things.

This money, however, was certainly not enough to enable the family

to live off the interest; it was enough to maintain them for,

perhaps, one or two years, no more. That's to say, it was money

that should not really be touched but set aside for emergencies;

money to live on had to be earned. His father was healthy but old,

and lacking in self confidence. During the five years that he had

not been working - the first holiday in a life that had been full of

strain and no success - he had put on a lot of weight and become

very slow and clumsy. Would Gregor's elderly mother now have to go

and earn money? She suffered from asthma and it was a strain for her

just to move about the home, every other day would be spent

struggling for breath on the sofa by the open window. Would his

sister have to go and earn money? She was still a child of

seventeen, her life up till then had been very enviable, consisting

of wearing nice clothes, sleeping late, helping out in the business,

joining in with a few modest pleasures and most of all playing the

violin. Whenever they began to talk of the need to earn money,

Gregor would always first let go of the door and then throw himself

onto the cool, leather sofa next to it, as he became quite hot with

shame and regret.

He would often lie there the whole night through, not sleeping a

wink but scratching at the leather for hours on end. Or he might go

to all the effort of pushing a chair to the window, climbing up onto

the sill and, propped up in the chair, leaning on the window to

stare out of it. He had used to feel a great sense of freedom from

doing this, but doing it now was obviously something more remembered

than experienced, as what he actually saw in this way was becoming

less distinct every day, even things that were quite near; he had

used to curse the ever-present view of the hospital across the

street, but now he could not see it at all, and if he had not known

that he lived in Charlottenstrasse, which was a quiet street despite

being in the middle of the city, he could have thought that he was

looking out the window at a barren waste where the grey sky and the

grey earth mingled inseparably. His observant sister only needed to

notice the chair twice before she would always push it back to its

exact position by the window after she had tidied up the room, and

even left the inner pane of the window open from then on.

If Gregor had only been able to speak to his sister and thank her

for all that she had to do for him it would have been easier for him

to bear it; but as it was it caused him pain. His sister,

naturally, tried as far as possible to pretend there was nothing

burdensome about it, and the longer it went on, of course, the

better she was able to do so, but as time went by Gregor was also

able to see through it all so much better. It had even become very

unpleasant for him, now, whenever she entered the room. No sooner

had she come in than she would quickly close the door as a

precaution so that no-one would have to suffer the view into

Gregor's room, then she would go straight to the window and pull it

hurriedly open almost as if she were suffocating. Even if it was

cold, she would stay at the window breathing deeply for a little

while. She would alarm Gregor twice a day with this running about

and noise making; he would stay under the couch shivering the whole

while, knowing full well that she would certainly have liked to

spare him this ordeal, but it was impossible for her to be in the

same room with him with the windows closed.

One day, about a month after Gregor's transformation when his sister

no longer had any particular reason to be shocked at his appearance,

she came into the room a little earlier than usual and found him

still staring out the window, motionless, and just where he would be

most horrible. In itself, his sister's not coming into the room

would have been no surprise for Gregor as it would have been

difficult for her to immediately open the window while he was still

there, but not only did she not come in, she went straight back and

closed the door behind her, a stranger would have thought he had

threatened her and tried to bite her. Gregor went straight to hide

himself under the couch, of course, but he had to wait until midday

before his sister came back and she seemed much more uneasy than

usual. It made him realise that she still found his appearance

unbearable and would continue to do so, she probably even had to

overcome the urge to flee when she saw the little bit of him that

protruded from under the couch. One day, in order to spare her even

this sight, he spent four hours carrying the bedsheet over to the

couch on his back and arranged it so that he was completely covered

and his sister would not be able to see him even if she bent down.

If she did not think this sheet was necessary then all she had to do

was take it off again, as it was clear enough that it was no

pleasure for Gregor to cut himself off so completely. She left the

sheet where it was. Gregor even thought he glimpsed a look of

gratitude one time when he carefully looked out from under the sheet

to see how his sister liked the new arrangement.

For the first fourteen days, Gregor's parents could not bring

themselves to come into the room to see him. He would often hear

them say how they appreciated all the new work his sister was doing

even though, before, they had seen her as a girl who was somewhat

useless and frequently been annoyed with her. But now the two of

them, father and mother, would often both wait outside the door of

Gregor's room while his sister tidied up in there, and as soon as

she went out again she would have to tell them exactly how

everything looked, what Gregor had eaten, how he had behaved this

time and whether, perhaps, any slight improvement could be seen.

His mother also wanted to go in and visit Gregor relatively soon but

his father and sister at first persuaded her against it. Gregor

listened very closely to all this, and approved fully. Later,

though, she had to be held back by force, which made her call out:

"Let me go and see Gregor, he is my unfortunate son! Can't you

understand I have to see him?", and Gregor would think to himself

that maybe it would be better if his mother came in, not every day

of course, but one day a week, perhaps; she could understand

everything much better than his sister who, for all her courage, was

still just a child after all, and really might not have had an

adult's appreciation of the burdensome job she had taken on.

Gregor's wish to see his mother was soon realised. Out of

consideration for his parents, Gregor wanted to avoid being seen at

the window during the day, the few square meters of the floor did

not give him much room to crawl about, it was hard to just lie

quietly through the night, his food soon stopped giving him any

pleasure at all, and so, to entertain himself, he got into the habit

of crawling up and down the walls and ceiling. He was especially

fond of hanging from the ceiling; it was quite different from lying

on the floor; he could breathe more freely; his body had a light

swing to it; and up there, relaxed and almost happy, it might happen

that he would surprise even himself by letting go of the ceiling and

landing on the floor with a crash. But now, of course, he had far

better control of his body than before and, even with a fall as

great as that, caused himself no damage. Very soon his sister

noticed Gregor's new way of entertaining himself - he had, after

all, left traces of the adhesive from his feet as he crawled about -

and got it into her head to make it as easy as possible for him by

removing the furniture that got in his way, especially the chest of

drawers and the desk. Now, this was not something that she would be

able to do by herself; she did not dare to ask for help from her

father; the sixteen year old maid had carried on bravely since the

cook had left but she certainly would not have helped in this, she

had even asked to be allowed to keep the kitchen locked at all times

and never to have to open the door unless it was especially

important; so his sister had no choice but to choose some time when

Gregor's father was not there and fetch his mother to help her. As

she approached the room, Gregor could hear his mother express her

joy, but once at the door she went silent. First, of course, his

sister came in and looked round to see that everything in the room

was alright; and only then did she let her mother enter. Gregor had

hurriedly pulled the sheet down lower over the couch and put more

folds into it so that everything really looked as if it had just

been thrown down by chance. Gregor also refrained, this time, from

spying out from under the sheet; he gave up the chance to see his

mother until later and was simply glad that she had come. "You can

come in, he can't be seen", said his sister, obviously leading her

in by the hand. The old chest of drawers was too heavy for a pair

of feeble women to be heaving about, but Gregor listened as they

pushed it from its place, his sister always taking on the heaviest

part of the work for herself and ignoring her mother's warnings that

she would strain herself. This lasted a very long time. After

labouring at it for fifteen minutes or more his mother said it would

be better to leave the chest where it was, for one thing it was too

heavy for them to get the job finished before Gregor's father got

home and leaving it in the middle of the room it would be in his way

even more, and for another thing it wasn't even sure that taking the

furniture away would really be any help to him. She thought just

the opposite; the sight of the bare walls saddened her right to her

heart; and why wouldn't Gregor feel the same way about it, he'd been

used to this furniture in his room for a long time and it would make

him feel abandoned to be in an empty room like that. Then, quietly,

almost whispering as if wanting Gregor (whose whereabouts she did

not know) to hear not even the tone of her voice, as she was

convinced that he did not understand her words, she added "and by

taking the furniture away, won't it seem like we're showing that

we've given up all hope of improvement and we're abandoning him to

cope for himself? I think it'd be best to leave the room exactly the

way it was before so that when Gregor comes back to us again he'll

find everything unchanged and he'll be able to forget the time in

between all the easier".

Hearing these words from his mother made Gregor realise that the

lack of any direct human communication, along with the monotonous

life led by the family during these two months, must have made him

confused - he could think of no other way of explaining to himself

why he had seriously wanted his room emptied out. Had he really

wanted to transform his room into a cave, a warm room fitted out

with the nice furniture he had inherited? That would have let him

crawl around unimpeded in any direction, but it would also have let

him quickly forget his past when he had still been human. He had

come very close to forgetting, and it had only been the voice of his

mother, unheard for so long, that had shaken him out of it. Nothing

should be removed; everything had to stay; he could not do without

the good influence the furniture had on his condition; and if the

furniture made it difficult for him to crawl about mindlessly that

was not a loss but a great advantage.

His sister, unfortunately, did not agree; she had become used to the

idea, not without reason, that she was Gregor's spokesman to his

parents about the things that concerned him. This meant that his

mother's advice now was sufficient reason for her to insist on

removing not only the chest of drawers and the desk, as she had

thought at first, but all the furniture apart from the all-important

couch. It was more than childish perversity, of course, or the

unexpected confidence she had recently acquired, that made her

insist; she had indeed noticed that Gregor needed a lot of room to

crawl about in, whereas the furniture, as far as anyone could see,

was of no use to him at all. Girls of that age, though, do become

enthusiastic about things and feel they must get their way whenever

they can. Perhaps this was what tempted Grete to make Gregor's

situation seem even more shocking than it was so that she could do

even more for him. Grete would probably be the only one who would

dare enter a room dominated by Gregor crawling about the bare walls

by himself.

So she refused to let her mother dissuade her. Gregor's mother

already looked uneasy in his room, she soon stopped speaking and

helped Gregor's sister to get the chest of drawers out with what

strength she had. The chest of drawers was something that Gregor

could do without if he had to, but the writing desk had to stay.

Hardly had the two women pushed the chest of drawers, groaning, out

of the room than Gregor poked his head out from under the couch to

see what he could do about it. He meant to be as careful and

considerate as he could, but, unfortunately, it was his mother who

came back first while Grete in the next room had her arms round the

chest, pushing and pulling at it from side to side by herself

without, of course, moving it an inch. His mother was not used to

the sight of Gregor, he might have made her ill, so Gregor hurried

backwards to the far end of the couch. In his startlement, though,

he was not able to prevent the sheet at its front from moving a

little. It was enough to attract his mother's attention. She stood

very still, remained there a moment, and then went back out to

Grete.

Gregor kept trying to assure himself that nothing unusual was

happening, it was just a few pieces of furniture being moved after

all, but he soon had to admit that the women going to and fro, their

little calls to each other, the scraping of the furniture on the

floor, all these things made him feel as if he were being assailed

from all sides. With his head and legs pulled in against him and

his body pressed to the floor, he was forced to admit to himself

that he could not stand all of this much longer. They were emptying

his room out; taking away everything that was dear to him; they had

already taken out the chest containing his fretsaw and other tools;

now they threatened to remove the writing desk with its place

clearly worn into the floor, the desk where he had done his homework

as a business trainee, at high school, even while he had been at

infant school--he really could not wait any longer to see whether

the two women's intentions were good. He had nearly forgotten they

were there anyway, as they were now too tired to say anything while

they worked and he could only hear their feet as they stepped

heavily on the floor.

So, while the women were leant against the desk in the other room

catching their breath, he sallied out, changed direction four times

not knowing what he should save first before his attention was

suddenly caught by the picture on the wall - which was already

denuded of everything else that had been on it - of the lady dressed

in copious fur. He hurried up onto the picture and pressed himself

against its glass, it held him firmly and felt good on his hot

belly. This picture at least, now totally covered by Gregor, would

certainly be taken away by no-one. He turned his head to face the

door into the living room so that he could watch the women when they

came back.

They had not allowed themselves a long rest and came back quite

soon; Grete had put her arm around her mother and was nearly

carrying her. "What shall we take now, then?", said Grete and

looked around. Her eyes met those of Gregor on the wall. Perhaps

only because her mother was there, she remained calm, bent her face

to her so that she would not look round and said, albeit hurriedly

and with a tremor in her voice: "Come on, let's go back in the

living room for a while?" Gregor could see what Grete had in mind,

she wanted to take her mother somewhere safe and then chase him down

from the wall. Well, she could certainly try it! He sat unyielding

on his picture. He would rather jump at Grete's face.

But Grete's words had made her mother quite worried, she stepped to

one side, saw the enormous brown patch against the flowers of the

wallpaper, and before she even realised it was Gregor that she saw

screamed: "Oh God, oh God!" Arms outstretched, she fell onto the

couch as if she had given up everything and stayed there immobile.

"Gregor!" shouted his sister, glowering at him and shaking her fist.

That was the first word she had spoken to him directly since his

transformation. She ran into the other room to fetch some kind of

smelling salts to bring her mother out of her faint; Gregor wanted

to help too - he could save his picture later, although he stuck

fast to the glass and had to pull himself off by force; then he,

too, ran into the next room as if he could advise his sister like in

the old days; but he had to just stand behind her doing nothing; she

was looking into various bottles, he startled her when she turned

round; a bottle fell to the ground and broke; a splinter cut

Gregor's face, some kind of caustic medicine splashed all over him;

now, without delaying any longer, Grete took hold of all the bottles

she could and ran with them in to her mother; she slammed the door

shut with her foot. So now Gregor was shut out from his mother,

who, because of him, might be near to death; he could not open the

door if he did not want to chase his sister away, and she had to

stay with his mother; there was nothing for him to do but wait; and,

oppressed with anxiety and self-reproach, he began to crawl about,

he crawled over everything, walls, furniture, ceiling, and finally

in his confusion as the whole room began to spin around him he fell

down into the middle of the dinner table.

He lay there for a while, numb and immobile, all around him it was

quiet, maybe that was a good sign. Then there was someone at the

door. The maid, of course, had locked herself in her kitchen so

that Grete would have to go and answer it. His father had arrived

home. "What's happened?" were his first words; Grete's appearance

must have made everything clear to him. She answered him with

subdued voice, and openly pressed her face into his chest: "Mother's

fainted, but she's better now. Gregor got out." "Just as I

expected", said his father, "just as I always said, but you women

wouldn't listen, would you." It was clear to Gregor that Grete had

not said enough and that his father took it to mean that something

bad had happened, that he was responsible for some act of violence.

That meant Gregor would now have to try to calm his father, as he

did not have the time to explain things to him even if that had been

possible. So he fled to the door of his room and pressed himself

against it so that his father, when he came in from the hall, could

see straight away that Gregor had the best intentions and would go

back into his room without delay, that it would not be necessary to

drive him back but that they had only to open the door and he would

disappear.

His father, though, was not in the mood to notice subtleties like

that; "Ah!", he shouted as he came in, sounding as if he were both

angry and glad at the same time. Gregor drew his head back from the

door and lifted it towards his father. He really had not imagined

his father the way he stood there now; of late, with his new habit

of crawling about, he had neglected to pay attention to what was

going on the rest of the flat the way he had done before. He really

ought to have expected things to have changed, but still, still, was

that really his father? The same tired man as used to be laying

there entombed in his bed when Gregor came back from his business

trips, who would receive him sitting in the armchair in his

nightgown when he came back in the evenings; who was hardly even

able to stand up but, as a sign of his pleasure, would just raise

his arms and who, on the couple of times a year when they went for a

walk together on a Sunday or public holiday wrapped up tightly in

his overcoat between Gregor and his mother, would always labour his

way forward a little more slowly than them, who were already walking

slowly for his sake; who would place his stick down carefully and,

if he wanted to say something would invariably stop and gather his

companions around him. He was standing up straight enough now;

dressed in a smart blue uniform with gold buttons, the sort worn by

the employees at the banking institute; above the high, stiff collar

of the coat his strong double-chin emerged; under the bushy

eyebrows, his piercing, dark eyes looked out fresh and alert; his

normally unkempt white hair was combed down painfully close to his

scalp. He took his cap, with its gold monogram from, probably, some

bank, and threw it in an arc right across the room onto the sofa,

put his hands in his trouser pockets, pushing back the bottom of his

long uniform coat, and, with look of determination, walked towards

Gregor. He probably did not even know himself what he had in mind,

but nonetheless lifted his feet unusually high. Gregor was amazed

at the enormous size of the soles of his boots, but wasted no time

with that - he knew full well, right from the first day of his new

life, that his father thought it necessary to always be extremely

strict with him. And so he ran up to his father, stopped when his

father stopped, scurried forwards again when he moved, even

slightly. In this way they went round the room several times

without anything decisive happening, without even giving the

impression of a chase as everything went so slowly. Gregor remained

all this time on the floor, largely because he feared his father

might see it as especially provoking if he fled onto the wall or

ceiling. Whatever he did, Gregor had to admit that he certainly

would not be able to keep up this running about for long, as for

each step his father took he had to carry out countless movements.

He became noticeably short of breath, even in his earlier life his

lungs had not been very reliable. Now, as he lurched about in his

efforts to muster all the strength he could for running he could

hardly keep his eyes open; his thoughts became too slow for him to

think of any other way of saving himself than running; he almost

forgot that the walls were there for him to use although, here, they

were concealed behind carefully carved furniture full of notches and

protrusions - then, right beside him, lightly tossed, something flew

down and rolled in front of him. It was an apple; then another one

immediately flew at him; Gregor froze in shock; there was no longer

any point in running as his father had decided to bombard him. He

had filled his pockets with fruit from the bowl on the sideboard and

now, without even taking the time for careful aim, threw one apple

after another. These little, red apples rolled about on the floor,

knocking into each other as if they had electric motors. An apple

thrown without much force glanced against Gregor's back and slid off

without doing any harm. Another one however, immediately following

it, hit squarely and lodged in his back; Gregor wanted to drag

himself away, as if he could remove the surprising, the incredible

pain by changing his position; but he felt as if nailed to the spot

and spread himself out, all his senses in confusion. The last thing

he saw was the door of his room being pulled open, his sister was

screaming, his mother ran out in front of her in her blouse (as his

sister had taken off some of her clothes after she had fainted to

make it easier for her to breathe), she ran to his father, her

skirts unfastened and sliding one after another to the ground,

stumbling over the skirts she pushed herself to his father, her arms

around him, uniting herself with him totally - now Gregor lost his

ability to see anything - her hands behind his father's head begging

him to spare Gregor's life.

III

No-one dared to remove the apple lodged in Gregor's flesh, so it

remained there as a visible reminder of his injury. He had suffered

it there for more than a month, and his condition seemed serious

enough to remind even his father that Gregor, despite his current

sad and revolting form, was a family member who could not be treated

as an enemy. On the contrary, as a family there was a duty to

swallow any revulsion for him and to be patient, just to be patient.

Because of his injuries, Gregor had lost much of his mobility -

probably permanently. He had been reduced to the condition of an

ancient invalid and it took him long, long minutes to crawl across

his room - crawling over the ceiling was out of the question - but

this deterioration in his condition was fully (in his opinion) made

up for by the door to the living room being left open every evening.

He got into the habit of closely watching it for one or two hours

before it was opened and then, lying in the darkness of his room

where he could not be seen from the living room, he could watch the

family in the light of the dinner table and listen to their

conversation - with everyone's permission, in a way, and thus quite

differently from before.

They no longer held the lively conversations of earlier times, of

course, the ones that Gregor always thought about with longing when

he was tired and getting into the damp bed in some small hotel room.

All of them were usually very quiet nowadays. Soon after dinner,

his father would go to sleep in his chair; his mother and sister

would urge each other to be quiet; his mother, bent deeply under the

lamp, would sew fancy underwear for a fashion shop; his sister, who

had taken a sales job, learned shorthand and French in the evenings

so that she might be able to get a better position later on.

Sometimes his father would wake up and say to Gregor's mother

"you're doing so much sewing again today!", as if he did not know

that he had been dozing - and then he would go back to sleep again

while mother and sister would exchange a tired grin.

With a kind of stubbornness, Gregor's father refused to take his

uniform off even at home; while his nightgown hung unused on its peg

Gregor's father would slumber where he was, fully dressed, as if

always ready to serve and expecting to hear the voice of his

superior even here. The uniform had not been new to start with, but

as a result of this it slowly became even shabbier despite the

efforts of Gregor's mother and sister to look after it. Gregor

would often spend the whole evening looking at all the stains on

this coat, with its gold buttons always kept polished and shiny,

while the old man in it would sleep, highly uncomfortable but

peaceful.

As soon as it struck ten, Gregor's mother would speak gently to his

father to wake him and try to persuade him to go to bed, as he

couldn't sleep properly where he was and he really had to get his

sleep if he was to be up at six to get to work. But since he had

been in work he had become more obstinate and would always insist on

staying longer at the table, even though he regularly fell asleep

and it was then harder than ever to persuade him to exchange the

chair for his bed. Then, however much mother and sister would

importune him with little reproaches and warnings he would keep

slowly shaking his head for a quarter of an hour with his eyes

closed and refusing to get up. Gregor's mother would tug at his

sleeve, whisper endearments into his ear, Gregor's sister would

leave her work to help her mother, but nothing would have any effect

on him. He would just sink deeper into his chair. Only when the

two women took him under the arms he would abruptly open his eyes,

look at them one after the other and say: "What a life! This is what

peace I get in my old age!" And supported by the two women he would

lift himself up carefully as if he were carrying the greatest load

himself, let the women take him to the door, send them off and carry

on by himself while Gregor's mother would throw down her needle and

his sister her pen so that they could run after his father and

continue being of help to him.

Who, in this tired and overworked family, would have had time to

give more attention to Gregor than was absolutely necessary? The

household budget became even smaller; so now the maid was dismissed;

an enormous, thick-boned charwoman with white hair that flapped

around her head came every morning and evening to do the heaviest

work; everything else was looked after by Gregor's mother on top of

the large amount of sewing work she did. Gregor even learned,

listening to the evening conversation about what price they had

hoped for, that several items of jewellery belonging to the family

had been sold, even though both mother and sister had been very fond

of wearing them at functions and celebrations. But the loudest

complaint was that although the flat was much too big for their

present circumstances, they could not move out of it, there was no

imaginable way of transferring Gregor to the new address. He could

see quite well, though, that there were more reasons than

consideration for him that made it difficult for them to move, it

would have been quite easy to transport him in any suitable crate

with a few air holes in it; the main thing holding the family back

from their decision to move was much more to do with their total

despair, and the thought that they had been struck with a misfortune

unlike anything experienced by anyone else they knew or were related

to. They carried out absolutely everything that the world expects

from poor people, Gregor's father brought bank employees their

breakfast, his mother sacrificed herself by washing clothes for

strangers, his sister ran back and forth behind her desk at the

behest of the customers, but they just did not have the strength to

do any more. And the injury in Gregor's back began to hurt as much

as when it was new. After they had come back from taking his father

to bed Gregor's mother and sister would now leave their work where

it was and sit close together, cheek to cheek; his mother would

point to Gregor's room and say "Close that door, Grete", and then,

when he was in the dark again, they would sit in the next room and

their tears would mingle, or they would simply sit there staring

dry-eyed at the table.

Gregor hardly slept at all, either night or day. Sometimes he would

think of taking over the family's affairs, just like before, the

next time the door was opened; he had long forgotten about his boss

and the chief clerk, but they would appear again in his thoughts,

the salesmen and the apprentices, that stupid teaboy, two or three

friends from other businesses, one of the chambermaids from a

provincial hotel, a tender memory that appeared and disappeared

again, a cashier from a hat shop for whom his attention had been

serious but too slow, - all of them appeared to him, mixed together

with strangers and others he had forgotten, but instead of helping

him and his family they were all of them inaccessible, and he was

glad when they disappeared. Other times he was not at all in the

mood to look after his family, he was filled with simple rage about

the lack of attention he was shown, and although he could think of

nothing he would have wanted, he made plans of how he could get into

the pantry where he could take all the things he was entitled to,

even if he was not hungry. Gregor's sister no longer thought about

how she could please him but would hurriedly push some food or other

into his room with her foot before she rushed out to work in the

morning and at midday, and in the evening she would sweep it away

again with the broom, indifferent as to whether it had been eaten or

- more often than not - had been left totally untouched. She still

cleared up the room in the evening, but now she could not have been

any quicker about it. Smears of dirt were left on the walls, here

and there were little balls of dust and filth. At first, Gregor

went into one of the worst of these places when his sister arrived

as a reproach to her, but he could have stayed there for weeks

without his sister doing anything about it; she could see the dirt

as well as he could but she had simply decided to leave him to it.

At the same time she became touchy in a way that was quite new for

her and which everyone in the family understood - cleaning up

Gregor's room was for her and her alone. Gregor's mother did once

thoroughly clean his room, and needed to use several bucketfuls of

water to do it - although that much dampness also made Gregor ill

and he lay flat on the couch, bitter and immobile. But his mother

was to be punished still more for what she had done, as hardly had

his sister arrived home in the evening than she noticed the change

in Gregor's room and, highly aggrieved, ran back into the living

room where, despite her mothers raised and imploring hands, she

broke into convulsive tears. Her father, of course, was startled

out of his chair and the two parents looked on astonished and

helpless; then they, too, became agitated; Gregor's father, standing

to the right of his mother, accused her of not leaving the cleaning

of Gregor's room to his sister; from her left, Gregor's sister

screamed at her that she was never to clean Gregor's room again;

while his mother tried to draw his father, who was beside himself

with anger, into the bedroom; his sister, quaking with tears,

thumped on the table with her small fists; and Gregor hissed in

anger that no-one had even thought of closing the door to save him

the sight of this and all its noise.

Gregor's sister was exhausted from going out to work, and looking

after Gregor as she had done before was even more work for her, but

even so his mother ought certainly not to have taken her place.

Gregor, on the other hand, ought not to be neglected. Now, though,

the charwoman was here. This elderly widow, with a robust bone

structure that made her able to withstand the hardest of things in

her long life, wasn't really repelled by Gregor. Just by chance one

day, rather than any real curiosity, she opened the door to Gregor's

room and found herself face to face with him. He was taken totally

by surprise, no-one was chasing him but he began to rush to and fro

while she just stood there in amazement with her hands crossed in

front of her. From then on she never failed to open the door

slightly every evening and morning and look briefly in on him. At

first she would call to him as she did so with words that she

probably considered friendly, such as "come on then, you old

dung-beetle!", or "look at the old dung-beetle there!" Gregor never

responded to being spoken to in that way, but just remained where he

was without moving as if the door had never even been opened. If

only they had told this charwoman to clean up his room every day

instead of letting her disturb him for no reason whenever she felt

like it! One day, early in the morning while a heavy rain struck the

windowpanes, perhaps indicating that spring was coming, she began to

speak to him in that way once again. Gregor was so resentful of it

that he started to move toward her, he was slow and infirm, but it

was like a kind of attack. Instead of being afraid, the charwoman

just lifted up one of the chairs from near the door and stood there

with her mouth open, clearly intending not to close her mouth until

the chair in her hand had been slammed down into Gregor's back.

"Aren't you coming any closer, then?", she asked when Gregor turned

round again, and she calmly put the chair back in the corner.

Gregor had almost entirely stopped eating. Only if he happened to

find himself next to the food that had been prepared for him he

might take some of it into his mouth to play with it, leave it there

a few hours and then, more often than not, spit it out again. At

first he thought it was distress at the state of his room that

stopped him eating, but he had soon got used to the changes made

there. They had got into the habit of putting things into this room

that they had no room for anywhere else, and there were now many

such things as one of the rooms in the flat had been rented out to

three gentlemen. These earnest gentlemen - all three of them had

full beards, as Gregor learned peering through the crack in the door

one day - were painfully insistent on things' being tidy. This

meant not only in their own room but, since they had taken a room in

this establishment, in the entire flat and especially in the

kitchen. Unnecessary clutter was something they could not tolerate,

especially if it was dirty. They had moreover brought most of their

own furnishings and equipment with them. For this reason, many

things had become superfluous which, although they could not be

sold, the family did not wish to discard. All these things found

their way into Gregor's room. The dustbins from the kitchen found

their way in there too. The charwoman was always in a hurry, and

anything she couldn't use for the time being she would just chuck in

there. He, fortunately, would usually see no more than the object

and the hand that held it. The woman most likely meant to fetch the

things back out again when she had time and the opportunity, or to

throw everything out in one go, but what actually happened was that

they were left where they landed when they had first been thrown

unless Gregor made his way through the junk and moved it somewhere

else. At first he moved it because, with no other room free where

he could crawl about, he was forced to, but later on he came to

enjoy it although moving about in that way left him sad and tired to

death, and he would remain immobile for hours afterwards.

The gentlemen who rented the room would sometimes take their evening

meal at home in the living room that was used by everyone, and so

the door to this room was often kept closed in the evening. But

Gregor found it easy to give up having the door open, he had, after

all, often failed to make use of it when it was open and, without

the family having noticed it, lain in his room in its darkest

corner. One time, though, the charwoman left the door to the living

room slightly open, and it remained open when the gentlemen who

rented the room came in in the evening and the light was put on.

They sat up at the table where, formerly, Gregor had taken his meals

with his father and mother, they unfolded the serviettes and picked

up their knives and forks. Gregor's mother immediately appeared in

the doorway with a dish of meat and soon behind her came his sister

with a dish piled high with potatoes. The food was steaming, and

filled the room with its smell. The gentlemen bent over the dishes

set in front of them as if they wanted to test the food before

eating it, and the gentleman in the middle, who seemed to count as

an authority for the other two, did indeed cut off a piece of meat

while it was still in its dish, clearly wishing to establish whether

it was sufficiently cooked or whether it should be sent back to the

kitchen. It was to his satisfaction, and Gregor's mother and

sister, who had been looking on anxiously, began to breathe again

and smiled.

The family themselves ate in the kitchen. Nonetheless, Gregor's

father came into the living room before he went into the kitchen,

bowed once with his cap in his hand and did his round of the table.

The gentlemen stood as one, and mumbled something into their beards.

Then, once they were alone, they ate in near perfect silence. It

seemed remarkable to Gregor that above all the various noises of

eating their chewing teeth could still be heard, as if they had

wanted to show Gregor that you need teeth in order to eat and it was

not possible to perform anything with jaws that are toothless

however nice they might be. "I'd like to eat something", said

Gregor anxiously, "but not anything like they're eating. They do

feed themselves. And here I am, dying!"

Throughout all this time, Gregor could not remember having heard the

violin being played, but this evening it began to be heard from the

kitchen. The three gentlemen had already finished their meal, the

one in the middle had produced a newspaper, given a page to each of

the others, and now they leant back in their chairs reading them and

smoking. When the violin began playing they became attentive, stood

up and went on tip-toe over to the door of the hallway where they

stood pressed against each other. Someone must have heard them in

the kitchen, as Gregor's father called out: "Is the playing perhaps

unpleasant for the gentlemen? We can stop it straight away." "On

the contrary", said the middle gentleman, "would the young lady not

like to come in and play for us here in the room, where it is, after

all, much more cosy and comfortable?" "Oh yes, we'd love to",

called back Gregor's father as if he had been the violin player

himself. The gentlemen stepped back into the room and waited.

Gregor's father soon appeared with the music stand, his mother with

the music and his sister with the violin. She calmly prepared

everything for her to begin playing; his parents, who had never

rented a room out before and therefore showed an exaggerated

courtesy towards the three gentlemen, did not even dare to sit on

their own chairs; his father leant against the door with his right

hand pushed in between two buttons on his uniform coat; his mother,

though, was offered a seat by one of the gentlemen and sat - leaving

the chair where the gentleman happened to have placed it - out of

the way in a corner.

His sister began to play; father and mother paid close attention,

one on each side, to the movements of her hands. Drawn in by the

playing, Gregor had dared to come forward a little and already had

his head in the living room. Before, he had taken great pride in

how considerate he was but now it hardly occurred to him that he had

become so thoughtless about the others. What's more, there was now

all the more reason to keep himself hidden as he was covered in the

dust that lay everywhere in his room and flew up at the slightest

movement; he carried threads, hairs, and remains of food about on

his back and sides; he was much too indifferent to everything now to

lay on his back and wipe himself on the carpet like he had used to

do several times a day. And despite this condition, he was not too

shy to move forward a little onto the immaculate floor of the living

room.

No-one noticed him, though. The family was totally preoccupied with

the violin playing; at first, the three gentlemen had put their

hands in their pockets and come up far too close behind the music

stand to look at all the notes being played, and they must have

disturbed Gregor's sister, but soon, in contrast with the family,

they withdrew back to the window with their heads sunk and talking

to each other at half volume, and they stayed by the window while

Gregor's father observed them anxiously. It really now seemed very

obvious that they had expected to hear some beautiful or

entertaining violin playing but had been disappointed, that they had

had enough of the whole performance and it was only now out of

politeness that they allowed their peace to be disturbed. It was

especially unnerving, the way they all blew the smoke from their

cigarettes upwards from their mouth and noses. Yet Gregor's sister

was playing so beautifully. Her face was leant to one side,

following the lines of music with a careful and melancholy

expression. Gregor crawled a little further forward, keeping his

head close to the ground so that he could meet her eyes if the

chance came. Was he an animal if music could captivate him so? It

seemed to him that he was being shown the way to the unknown

nourishment he had been yearning for. He was determined to make his

way forward to his sister and tug at her skirt to show her she might

come into his room with her violin, as no-one appreciated her

playing here as much as he would. He never wanted to let her out of

his room, not while he lived, anyway; his shocking appearance

should, for once, be of some use to him; he wanted to be at every

door of his room at once to hiss and spit at the attackers; his

sister should not be forced to stay with him, though, but stay of

her own free will; she would sit beside him on the couch with her

ear bent down to him while he told her how he had always intended to

send her to the conservatory, how he would have told everyone about

it last Christmas - had Christmas really come and gone already? - if

this misfortune hadn't got in the way, and refuse to let anyone

dissuade him from it. On hearing all this, his sister would break

out in tears of emotion, and Gregor would climb up to her shoulder

and kiss her neck, which, since she had been going out to work, she

had kept free without any necklace or collar.

"Mr. Samsa!", shouted the middle gentleman to Gregor's father,

pointing, without wasting any more words, with his forefinger at

Gregor as he slowly moved forward. The violin went silent, the

middle of the three gentlemen first smiled at his two friends,

shaking his head, and then looked back at Gregor. His father seemed

to think it more important to calm the three gentlemen before

driving Gregor out, even though they were not at all upset and

seemed to think Gregor was more entertaining than the violin playing

had been. He rushed up to them with his arms spread out and

attempted to drive them back into their room at the same time as

trying to block their view of Gregor with his body. Now they did

become a little annoyed, and it was not clear whether it was his

father's behaviour that annoyed them or the dawning realisation that

they had had a neighbour like Gregor in the next room without

knowing it. They asked Gregor's father for explanations, raised

their arms like he had, tugged excitedly at their beards and moved

back towards their room only very slowly. Meanwhile Gregor's sister

had overcome the despair she had fallen into when her playing was

suddenly interrupted. She had let her hands drop and let violin and

bow hang limply for a while but continued to look at the music as if

still playing, but then she suddenly pulled herself together, lay

the instrument on her mother's lap who still sat laboriously

struggling for breath where she was, and ran into the next room

which, under pressure from her father, the three gentlemen were more

quickly moving toward. Under his sister's experienced hand, the

pillows and covers on the beds flew up and were put into order and

she had already finished making the beds and slipped out again

before the three gentlemen had reached the room. Gregor's father

seemed so obsessed with what he was doing that he forgot all the

respect he owed to his tenants. He urged them and pressed them

until, when he was already at the door of the room, the middle of

the three gentlemen shouted like thunder and stamped his foot and

thereby brought Gregor's father to a halt. "I declare here and

now", he said, raising his hand and glancing at Gregor's mother and

sister to gain their attention too, "that with regard to the

repugnant conditions that prevail in this flat and with this family"

- here he looked briefly but decisively at the floor - "I give

immediate notice on my room. For the days that I have been living

here I will, of course, pay nothing at all, on the contrary I will

consider whether to proceed with some kind of action for damages

from you, and believe me it would be very easy to set out the

grounds for such an action." He was silent and looked straight

ahead as if waiting for something. And indeed, his two friends

joined in with the words: "And we also give immediate notice." With

that, he took hold of the door handle and slammed the door.

Gregor's father staggered back to his seat, feeling his way with his

hands, and fell into it; it looked as if he was stretching himself

out for his usual evening nap but from the uncontrolled way his head

kept nodding it could be seen that he was not sleeping at all.

Throughout all this, Gregor had lain still where the three gentlemen

had first seen him. His disappointment at the failure of his plan,

and perhaps also because he was weak from hunger, made it impossible

for him to move. He was sure that everyone would turn on him any

moment, and he waited. He was not even startled out of this state

when the violin on his mother's lap fell from her trembling fingers

and landed loudly on the floor.

"Father, Mother", said his sister, hitting the table with her hand

as introduction, "we can't carry on like this. Maybe you can't see

it, but I can. I don't want to call this monster my brother, all I

can say is: we have to try and get rid of it. We've done all that's

humanly possible to look after it and be patient, I don't think

anyone could accuse us of doing anything wrong."

"She's absolutely right", said Gregor's father to himself. His

mother, who still had not had time to catch her breath, began to

cough dully, her hand held out in front of her and a deranged

expression in her eyes.

Gregor's sister rushed to his mother and put her hand on her

forehead. Her words seemed to give Gregor's father some more

definite ideas. He sat upright, played with his uniform cap between

the plates left by the three gentlemen after their meal, and

occasionally looked down at Gregor as he lay there immobile.

"We have to try and get rid of it", said Gregor's sister, now

speaking only to her father, as her mother was too occupied with

coughing to listen, "it'll be the death of both of you, I can see it

coming. We can't all work as hard as we have to and then come home

to be tortured like this, we can't endure it. I can't endure it any

more." And she broke out so heavily in tears that they flowed down

the face of her mother, and she wiped them away with mechanical hand

movements.

"My child", said her father with sympathy and obvious understanding,

"what are we to do?"

His sister just shrugged her shoulders as a sign of the helplessness

and tears that had taken hold of her, displacing her earlier

certainty.

"If he could just understand us", said his father almost as a

question; his sister shook her hand vigorously through her tears as

a sign that of that there was no question.

"If he could just understand us", repeated Gregor's father, closing

his eyes in acceptance of his sister's certainty that that was quite

impossible, "then perhaps we could come to some kind of arrangement

with him. But as it is ..."

"It's got to go", shouted his sister, "that's the only way, Father.

You've got to get rid of the idea that that's Gregor. We've only

harmed ourselves by believing it for so long. How can that be

Gregor? If it were Gregor he would have seen long ago that it's not

possible for human beings to live with an animal like that and he

would have gone of his own free will. We wouldn't have a brother

any more, then, but we could carry on with our lives and remember

him with respect. As it is this animal is persecuting us, it's

driven out our tenants, it obviously wants to take over the whole

flat and force us to sleep on the streets. Father, look, just

look", she suddenly screamed, "he's starting again!" In her alarm,

which was totally beyond Gregor's comprehension, his sister even

abandoned his mother as she pushed herself vigorously out of her

chair as if more willing to sacrifice her own mother than stay

anywhere near Gregor. She rushed over to behind her father, who had

become excited merely because she was and stood up half raising his

hands in front of Gregor's sister as if to protect her.

But Gregor had had no intention of frightening anyone, least of all

his sister. All he had done was begin to turn round so that he

could go back into his room, although that was in itself quite

startling as his pain-wracked condition meant that turning round

required a great deal of effort and he was using his head to help

himself do it, repeatedly raising it and striking it against the

floor. He stopped and looked round. They seemed to have realised

his good intention and had only been alarmed briefly. Now they all

looked at him in unhappy silence. His mother lay in her chair with

her legs stretched out and pressed against each other, her eyes

nearly closed with exhaustion; his sister sat next to his father

with her arms around his neck.

"Maybe now they'll let me turn round", thought Gregor and went back

to work. He could not help panting loudly with the effort and had

sometimes to stop and take a rest. No-one was making him rush any

more, everything was left up to him. As soon as he had finally

finished turning round he began to move straight ahead. He was

amazed at the great distance that separated him from his room, and

could not understand how he had covered that distance in his weak

state a little while before and almost without noticing it. He

concentrated on crawling as fast as he could and hardly noticed that

there was not a word, not any cry, from his family to distract him.

He did not turn his head until he had reached the doorway. He did

not turn it all the way round as he felt his neck becoming stiff,

but it was nonetheless enough to see that nothing behind him had

changed, only his sister had stood up. With his last glance he saw

that his mother had now fallen completely asleep.

He was hardly inside his room before the door was hurriedly shut,

bolted and locked. The sudden noise behind Gregor so startled him

that his little legs collapsed under him. It was his sister who had

been in so much of a rush. She had been standing there waiting and

sprung forward lightly, Gregor had not heard her coming at all, and

as she turned the key in the lock she said loudly to her parents "At

last!".

"What now, then?", Gregor asked himself as he looked round in the

darkness. He soon made the discovery that he could no longer move

at all. This was no surprise to him, it seemed rather that being

able to actually move around on those spindly little legs until then

was unnatural. He also felt relatively comfortable. It is true

that his entire body was aching, but the pain seemed to be slowly

getting weaker and weaker and would finally disappear altogether.

He could already hardly feel the decayed apple in his back or the

inflamed area around it, which was entirely covered in white dust.

He thought back of his family with emotion and love. If it was

possible, he felt that he must go away even more strongly than his

sister. He remained in this state of empty and peaceful rumination

until he heard the clock tower strike three in the morning. He

watched as it slowly began to get light everywhere outside the

window too. Then, without his willing it, his head sank down

completely, and his last breath flowed weakly from his nostrils.

When the cleaner came in early in the morning - they'd often asked

her not to keep slamming the doors but with her strength and in her

hurry she still did, so that everyone in the flat knew when she'd

arrived and from then on it was impossible to sleep in peace - she

made her usual brief look in on Gregor and at first found nothing

special. She thought he was laying there so still on purpose,

playing the martyr; she attributed all possible understanding to

him. She happened to be holding the long broom in her hand, so she

tried to tickle Gregor with it from the doorway. When she had no

success with that she tried to make a nuisance of herself and poked

at him a little, and only when she found she could shove him across

the floor with no resistance at all did she start to pay attention.

She soon realised what had really happened, opened her eyes wide,

whistled to herself, but did not waste time to yank open the bedroom

doors and shout loudly into the darkness of the bedrooms: "Come and

'ave a look at this, it's dead, just lying there, stone dead!"

Mr. and Mrs. Samsa sat upright there in their marriage bed and had

to make an effort to get over the shock caused by the cleaner before

they could grasp what she was saying. But then, each from his own

side, they hurried out of bed. Mr. Samsa threw the blanket over his

shoulders, Mrs. Samsa just came out in her nightdress; and that is

how they went into Gregor's room. On the way they opened the door

to the living room where Grete had been sleeping since the three

gentlemen had moved in; she was fully dressed as if she had never

been asleep, and the paleness of her face seemed to confirm this.

"Dead?", asked Mrs. Samsa, looking at the charwoman enquiringly,

even though she could have checked for herself and could have known

it even without checking. "That's what I said", replied the

cleaner, and to prove it she gave Gregor's body another shove with

the broom, sending it sideways across the floor. Mrs. Samsa made a

movement as if she wanted to hold back the broom, but did not

complete it. "Now then", said Mr. Samsa, "let's give thanks to God

for that". He crossed himself, and the three women followed his

example. Grete, who had not taken her eyes from the corpse, said:

"Just look how thin he was. He didn't eat anything for so long.

The food came out again just the same as when it went in". Gregor's

body was indeed completely dried up and flat, they had not seen it

until then, but now he was not lifted up on his little legs, nor did

he do anything to make them look away.

"Grete, come with us in here for a little while", said Mrs. Samsa

with a pained smile, and Grete followed her parents into the bedroom

but not without looking back at the body. The cleaner shut the door

and opened the window wide. Although it was still early in the

morning the fresh air had something of warmth mixed in with it. It

was already the end of March, after all.

The three gentlemen stepped out of their room and looked round in

amazement for their breakfasts; they had been forgotten about.

"Where is our breakfast?", the middle gentleman asked the cleaner

irritably. She just put her finger on her lips and made a quick and

silent sign to the men that they might like to come into Gregor's

room. They did so, and stood around Gregor's corpse with their

hands in the pockets of their well-worn coats. It was now quite

light in the room.

Then the door of the bedroom opened and Mr. Samsa appeared in his

uniform with his wife on one arm and his daughter on the other. All

of them had been crying a little; Grete now and then pressed her

face against her father's arm.

"Leave my home. Now!", said Mr. Samsa, indicating the door and

without letting the women from him. "What do you mean?", asked the

middle of the three gentlemen somewhat disconcerted, and he smiled

sweetly. The other two held their hands behind their backs and

continually rubbed them together in gleeful anticipation of a loud

quarrel which could only end in their favour. "I mean just what I

said", answered Mr. Samsa, and, with his two companions, went in a

straight line towards the man. At first, he stood there still,

looking at the ground as if the contents of his head were

rearranging themselves into new positions. "Alright, we'll go

then", he said, and looked up at Mr. Samsa as if he had been

suddenly overcome with humility and wanted permission again from

Mr. Samsa for his decision. Mr. Samsa merely opened his eyes wide

and briefly nodded to him several times. At that, and without

delay, the man actually did take long strides into the front

hallway; his two friends had stopped rubbing their hands some time

before and had been listening to what was being said. Now they

jumped off after their friend as if taken with a sudden fear that

Mr. Samsa might go into the hallway in front of them and break the

connection with their leader. Once there, all three took their hats

from the stand, took their sticks from the holder, bowed without a

word and left the premises. Mr. Samsa and the two women followed

them out onto the landing; but they had had no reason to mistrust

the men's intentions and as they leaned over the landing they saw how

the three gentlemen made slow but steady progress down the many

steps. As they turned the corner on each floor they disappeared and

would reappear a few moments later; the further down they went, the

more that the Samsa family lost interest in them; when a butcher's

boy, proud of posture with his tray on his head, passed them on his

way up and came nearer than they were, Mr. Samsa and the women came

away from the landing and went, as if relieved, back into the flat.

They decided the best way to make use of that day was for relaxation

and to go for a walk; not only had they earned a break from work but

they were in serious need of it. So they sat at the table and wrote

three letters of excusal, Mr. Samsa to his employers, Mrs. Samsa

to her contractor and Grete to her principal. The cleaner came in

while they were writing to tell them she was going, she'd finished

her work for that morning. The three of them at first just nodded

without looking up from what they were writing, and it was only when

the cleaner still did not seem to want to leave that they looked up

in irritation. "Well?", asked Mr. Samsa. The charwoman stood in

the doorway with a smile on her face as if she had some tremendous

good news to report, but would only do it if she was clearly asked

to. The almost vertical little ostrich feather on her hat, which

had been a source of irritation to Mr. Samsa all the time she had

been working for them, swayed gently in all directions. "What is it

you want then?", asked Mrs. Samsa, whom the cleaner had the most

respect for. "Yes", she answered, and broke into a friendly laugh

that made her unable to speak straight away, "well then, that thing

in there, you needn't worry about how you're going to get rid of it.

That's all been sorted out." Mrs. Samsa and Grete bent down over

their letters as if intent on continuing with what they were

writing; Mr. Samsa saw that the cleaner wanted to start describing

everything in detail but, with outstretched hand, he made it quite

clear that she was not to. So, as she was prevented from telling

them all about it, she suddenly remembered what a hurry she was in

and, clearly peeved, called out "Cheerio then, everyone", turned

round sharply and left, slamming the door terribly as she went.

"Tonight she gets sacked", said Mr. Samsa, but he received no reply

from either his wife or his daughter as the charwoman seemed to have

destroyed the peace they had only just gained. They got up and went

over to the window where they remained with their arms around each

other. Mr. Samsa twisted round in his chair to look at them and sat

there watching for a while. Then he called out: "Come here, then.

Let's forget about all that old stuff, shall we. Come and give me a

bit of attention". The two women immediately did as he said,

hurrying over to him where they kissed him and hugged him and then

they quickly finished their letters.

After that, the three of them left the flat together, which was

something they had not done for months, and took the tram out to the

open country outside the town. They had the tram, filled with warm

sunshine, all to themselves. Leant back comfortably on their seats,

they discussed their prospects and found that on closer examination

they were not at all bad - until then they had never asked each

other about their work but all three had jobs which were very good

and held particularly good promise for the future. The greatest

improvement for the time being, of course, would be achieved quite

easily by moving house; what they needed now was a flat that was

smaller and cheaper than the current one which had been chosen by

Gregor, one that was in a better location and, most of all, more

practical. All the time, Grete was becoming livelier. With all the

worry they had been having of late her cheeks had become pale, but,

while they were talking, Mr. and Mrs. Samsa were struck, almost

simultaneously, with the thought of how their daughter was

blossoming into a well built and beautiful young lady. They became

quieter. Just from each other's glance and almost without knowing

it they agreed that it would soon be time to find a good man for

her. And, as if in confirmation of their new dreams and good

intentions, as soon as they reached their destination Grete was the

first to get up and stretch out her young body.

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