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### Grete Samsa: A Hidden Metamorphosis

In Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, we witness a traveling salesman (and primary supporter of his family) by the name of Gregor Samsa discover that he has been transformed into an insect overnight by unknown forces. As we observe the Samsa family's reaction towards this spectacle, we become acquainted with the extreme dynamicity of human nature as Gregor's physical metamorphosis into an insect catalyzes his younger sister's behavioral metamorphosis. Throughout the passage, the limiting nature of Gregor's transformation proves to be the perfect opportunity for Grete Samsa to grow from being a timid, carefree teenager to a responsible young woman capable of supporting her family.

One of our first impressions of Grete is that she is emotionally immature and pampered in a childlike way by the Samsa family. For instance, her initial reaction is an expression of panicked confusion and unreasonable distress when Gregor does not come out of his room, "In the right-hand room, his sister began to sob...She was probably newly out of bed and hadn't even begun to put on her clothes yet." (Kafka 96). The latter portion of this quote in particular speaks to her childish inability to process an abnormal situation, as she immediately resorts to a breaking down— a reaction one may have in the worst-case scenario— whereas nothing substantially tragic has occurred (at this point, she has not yet seen Gregor). This fragile behavior suggests that Grete is unaccustomed to dealing with stress and may have an easier life than Gregor. This theory is only reinforced as we examine a worrying thought from Gregor's perspective regarding his sister's lavish lifestyle, "And was his sister to earn her bread, she who

was still a child of seventeen, and whose life hitherto had been so pleasant... dressing herself nicely, sleeping long... going out to a few modest entertainments... above all playing the violin?" (Kafka 112) This quote acutely conveys that Grete, who can afford to relax and enjoy herself, and can experience the luxury of prioritizing an instrumental hobby, is undoubtedly a dependent individual in the family. It is also worth noting that she is explicitly referred to as a 'child of seventeen', a phrase that concretely defines Gregor's (and likely her parents') perception of her.

However, as later scenarios reveal that she has inherited the role that Gregor previously had as the main provider of the Samsa family, we begin to recognize the development of a new maturity within Grete, especially on the familial level. This pattern is clearly reflected in their parent's changed demeanor toward Grete, "... he often heard them expressing their appreciation of his sister's activities, whereas formerly they had... scolded her for being a somewhat useless daughter." (Kafka 114). Her adult role in the family is further emphasized through the symbolism of Grete confidently guiding her reluctant mother into Gregor's room when they attempt to empty it of Gregor's old furniture, "...obviously leading her mother in by the hand." (Kafka 115). Kafka's explicit usage of the term *leading* indicates that Grete is both literally and metaphorically taking on a leadership role as she helps her family navigate through their peculiar situation. To elaborate on her role in the family as well as her seemingly replacing Gregor's position, Grete takes on a job as a saleswoman as a means of lightening their financial burden, "his sister, who had taken a job as a salesgirl, was learning shorthand and French in the evenings on the chance of bettering herself..." (Kafka 123). In contrast to her earlier passions, which were primarily for the sake of pleasure, Grete's latest pursuits are centered around providing for her family. In addition, we can infer that she has a busy schedule and needed to sacrifice what she

truly enjoyed to make room for the ambitions that would realistically allow for her to continue providing for her family— such as learning shorthand and French. Sacrificing one's personal hobbies for the betterment of others is quite the selfless act, and this behavior on Grete's part is a testament to how much she has matured from the initial moments of Gregor's transformation.

In this powerful work, Kafka beautifully illustrates the much more significant metamorphosis that Grete undergoes in the backdrop of her brother's literal metamorphosis. A transformation of this magnitude and concentration in Grete's behavior would not have been possible without Gregor's transformation, as we can predict that Gregor would have continued taking on the full weight of financial responsibility towards his family. The physical change he experienced forced him to step back from his job, and indirectly made a space for Grete to grow into a familial role that, when compared to her previous emotional fragility and childishness, is characterized by greater maturity and financial responsibility.