

# The Metamorphosis

## Frenz Kafka

### Summary

Gregor Samsa wakes up to find that he has been transformed into a giant insect. Gregor briefly examines his new body, but wonders only momentarily about what has happened to him. His attention quickly switches to observing his room, which he finds very ordinary but a bit small, and a framed magazine clipping of a woman in fur hanging up on the wall. Since he can't turn on his side, Gregor cannot fall asleep, so instead he begins thinking about his job. He is a traveling salesman, and he hates traveling because he dislikes worrying and getting up early. Gregor's chief at work is extremely tyrannical, and Gregor wants to quit the job but cannot do so until he has paid off the debts that his parents owe the chief.

Gregor wants to get up to go to work, but suddenly realizes that he is already late and must have missed the alarm. He can't call in sick because he has not missed a day of work in five years and it would look suspicious. Gregor's mother calls to him, and he answers her, noticing that his voice is changing. Gregor's father and Grete, his sister, realize that he is still at home and try to enter his room, but he has locked his doors and they can't get in. Gregor attempts to get out of bed, but finds this very difficult. He realizes that he is now very late, and lies back hoping that some clear thinking will resolve the situation. Suddenly the doorbell rings and the chief clerk comes into the apartment. Angry that his firm sends the chief clerk himself if he is only a little late, Gregor finally swings himself out of bed.

As the family entreats Gregor to open the door, he refuses. Mrs. Samsa insists that Gregor must be ill or he would not be acting like this. The chief clerk loses his temper and tells Gregor that he is shocked by his attitude, insisting that his position in the company is not unassailable because his work has been poor lately. Gregor is angered by this speech, and insists that he is simply feeling slightly indisposed but will soon return to work. He retorts that his business has not been

bad lately. Because of the changes in Gregor's voice, no one outside understands a word he says. Fearing he is ill, his parents send Grete and the servant girl to get the doctor and the locksmith. With great difficulty Gregor manages to open the door by himself.

Seeing Gregor, the chief clerk backs away while his father begins to weep. Gregor begs the chief clerk to explain the situation at the office and to stand up for him. He says that he will gladly come back to work and asks the chief clerk not to leave without agreeing with him. Gregor tries to stop the clerk so as to keep him from leaving with such a negative view of things, but then his mother, backing away, knocks over a coffee pot, causing a commotion and giving the chief clerk an opportunity to get away. Gregor's father picks up a walking stick to drive Gregor back into his room. Gregor gets stuck in the doorway, and his father shoves him through, injuring him in the process, and slams the door behind him.

Gregor wakes up at twilight and smells food. He realizes that his sister had brought him milk with bread in it. Gregor attempts to drink the milk, but finds that he is repulsed by the taste. Gregor notices that his father is not reading the paper to the family as he usually does and there is complete silence in the apartment. He wants someone to come in his room, but the doors are locked from the outside and no one will enter. Gregor climbs under the couch, where he feels more comfortable, and decides that he has to help his family through this difficult situation. Gregor's sister brings him a variety of foods in order to determine what he will eat. She throws away everything he doesn't finish, even if he hasn't touched it. Gregor hides under the couch to protect Grete from having to see him.

Assuming that Gregor can't understand anything, no one talks to him directly, so he learns what is happening by listening to their conversations through the door. He finds out that the family has money saved from his father's business, which had collapsed five years ago. Gregor had not known about this money, and when his father's business fell apart, he had thrown himself into his work in order to

provide for his family. The family's initial excitement of receiving his earnings had worn off, however, and he remained intimate only with Grete, whom he had wanted to send to the Conservatory to study the violin.

Gregor watches his movements carefully, since any noise he makes distracts his family. He learns from their conversations that in addition to money from the business, the family has also saved money from his salary, but it isn't enough to live off of for very long. Gregor feels deep shame every time money is mentioned. He finds that his vision is getting worse, so that he can no longer see across the street. Every time Grete walks into the room, she runs to open the window, which bothers Gregor. Realizing that his sister is uncomfortable in his presence, Gregor figures out a way to cover himself with a sheet to keep out of sight. Gregor's parents never come into his room, and when his mother begs to see her son, the others hold her back.

Gregor discovers that he enjoys climbing the walls and the ceiling. Noticing this, his sister decides to give him more space by clearing the furniture from his room, and she asks her mother to help. Gregor's mother says that this will make it look like they are giving up on Gregor's recovery, but Grete disagrees. Hearing his mother's voice, Gregor realizes the importance of the furniture to him. The noise that the women make upsets him, and he decides to come out of hiding to save the framed picture on the wall from being taken. Seeing him, his mother faints and Grete runs out of the room for medicine to revive her with. Gregor follows and when his sister sees him she runs into his room and slams the door, trapping Gregor outside. His father arrives to find him out of his room and begins throwing apples at him. One of these lodges itself in Gregor's back, almost crippling him. As he loses consciousness, his mother begs her husband to spare her son's life.

Gregor's injury makes the family decide to be more accepting of him, and they leave his door open so he can watch them. They are very quiet most of the time and extremely tired from the jobs they have taken. No one bothers with Gregor too much. They have replaced the servant girl with a charwoman. Gregor, lying in his room, resorts to his memory. The family considers moving, but can't because they

don't know how to move Gregor. He becomes angry that he is being neglected. Grete barely cleans his room and doesn't bother very much with his food anymore. When his mother tries to clean the room in Grete's absence, this triggers a family fight.

The charwoman, discovering Gregor, is not repulsed but rather spends her time teasing him, which annoys him to no end. Three lodgers have moved into the apartment, and the excess furniture, as well as all superfluous junk, is moved into Gregor's room so that he barely has room to move. He also stops eating almost entirely. The door to his room is now usually kept closed because of the lodgers, but Gregor doesn't care any more and often ignores it even when it's open.

The lodgers, who are domineering and receive too much service and respect from Gregor's parents, ask Grete to play the violin in the living room when they hear her practicing. She begins to play, but the lodgers are soon tired of this and move away to show that they are disappointed with her playing. Gregor, however, is drawn to the music and crawls out of his room to get closer, dreaming of getting Grete to play for him in his room and of telling her about his plans to send her to the Conservatory. The lodgers suddenly notice Gregor and give notice immediately, saying they will not pay for the time they have lived there.

Grete steps forward and tells her parents that they have to get rid of Gregor. He is persecuting them and trying to drive them out of the apartment and, if he really were Gregor, he would have left of his own accord and let them live their lives in peace. Suddenly realizing that he feels only love and tenderness for his family, Gregor understands that his sister is right and he should disappear. He returns to his room, waits until sunrise, and dies.

Gregor's family is happy, but they also mourn his passing. Mr. Samsa instantly kicks the lodgers out and the family decides to take the day off from work and go for a



stroll. They feel relieved and the future seems bright to them. The parents notice that their daughter has grown up and decide that it is time to find her a husband. At the end of their trip, she is the first to stand up and stretch.

## **Character List**

### **Gregor Samsa**

A traveling salesman who hates his job but is forced to keep it in order to support his family and pay off his father's debts. Gregor suddenly finds himself transformed into a giant insect. Never coming to terms with his metamorphosis, he struggles with intense feelings of guilt as if his inability to support his family were his own fault. Though freed from his job, Gregor is now a burden to his family and is kept locked in his room. Isolated and neglected, Gregor is a metaphor for the human being oppressed by capitalism and alienated from work, family, and himself.

### **Grete**

Gregor's younger sister. She is the only one in the family with whom Gregor was intimate. At first, she takes it upon herself to clean his room and feed him. With time, however, she loses interest in this and leaves him alone. Grete, who first cared so much for Gregor, is also the first to assert that the family must get rid of him. Gregor had planned to use all his money to send Grete to the Conservatory to study violin, and her playing awakens his humanity.

### **Mr. Samsa**

Gregor's father, having lived a "laborious though unsuccessful life" and collapsed his business, has become exceptionally lazy, doing nothing while his son earns all the money. When misfortune strikes, Mr. Samsa puts on a uniform and goes to work. He is suspicious of the transformed Gregor from the beginning, and always assumes the worst if his son emerges from his room. He first wounds Gregor while

trying to shove him into his room and then cripples him by throwing an apple into his back.

### **Mrs. Samsa**

Gregor's mother is also forced to go to work to make money for the family. Her relation to Gregor is one of dutiful and loving mother, but her tendency to faint upon seeing him is not conducive to helping him. After begging to see Gregor, she is finally allowed in his room, but faints as soon as he appears. She then proceeds to save Gregor from his father's apple-throwing wrath. Yet, since Mrs. Samsa is extremely quiet and always does what she is told, her opinions on family affairs remain unknown and her personality is subsumed in her husband's authority.

### **Chief**

Gregor's boss at work is the great symbol of everything wrong with capitalism. He sits behind his desk, talking down to his employees. Gregor knows that if he calls in sick for the first time in five years, his chief would come in person to call him lazy.

### **Chief clerk**

The Chief Clerk is the Chief's mouthpiece. He himself arrives at Gregor's house when the former is late to work and thus throws the entire family into disorder. When Gregor does not unlock his room, the Chief Clerk tells Gregor, in front of the family, that he is under suspicion of having stolen money and that his work is very unsatisfactory, though this isn't true.

### **Charwoman**

The charwoman is the last servant left in the family, taken on after the others are dismissed. She is not repulsed by Gregor but rather attempts to play with him, annoying him greatly. She is the only character who attributes intelligence to Gregor. The charwoman is excited both by Gregor's existence and by his death.

### **The Lodgers**

Caricatures of gentlemen, the lodgers dominate the overly servile Samsa family. They are taken on because the family needs money, and they take it upon themselves to run the household, making sure that everything is ordered and nothing is superfluous. The lodgers carefully inspect their food and rudely show displeasure at Grete's violin playing. At the first sign of Gregor they give notice and refuse to pay for the room. Mr. Samsa finally asserts himself, revealing the lodgers' cowardice in the face of authority.

### Servant girl (Anna)

The servant girl stays on after Gregor's metamorphosis, but asks that she be allowed to lock herself in the kitchen unless summoned. She is dismissed by the Samsas once they run out of money to pay her.

### Cook

Begs for permission to leave the family as soon as she finds out about Gregor's metamorphosis. She is extremely grateful when she is allowed to go and promises to tell no one about Gregor. Like the other servants, the cook serves to demonstrate the "high life" that the family was living at Gregor's expense.

## Themes

### Economic effects on human relationships

Gregor is enslaved by his family because he is the one who makes money. Thus, with the possible exception of his sister, the family seems to treat him not as a member but as a source of income. When Gregor is no longer able to work after his metamorphosis, he is treated with revulsion and neglected. Once the family begins working, they also find difficulty communicating with each other, eating dinner in silence and fighting among themselves. The exhaustion of dehumanizing jobs and the recognition that people are only valuable so long as they earn a salary keeps

anyone who works isolated from others and unable to establish human relations with them.

### **Family duty**

The theme of family and the duties of family members to each other drive the interactions between Gregor and the others. His thoughts are almost entirely of the need to support his parents and sending his sister to the Conservatory. Though Gregor hates his job, he follows the call of duty to his family and goes far beyond simple duty. The family, on the other hand, takes care of Gregor after his metamorphosis only so far as duty seems to necessitate. He is kept locked in his room and brought food. In the end, his room is barely cleaned and his sister no longer cares about what food she brings him. Her actions are routine, as she only wants to do enough that she can claim she has fulfilled her duty. When she decides she has had enough, she insists that their duty to him has been fulfilled: "I don't think anyone could reproach us in the slightest," she says as she suggests that they need to get rid of him.

### **Alienation**

Before his metamorphosis, Gregor is alienated from his job, his humanity, his family, and even his body, as we see from the fact that he barely notices his transformation. In fact, even his consideration for his family seems to be something alien to him, as he barely notices it when he loses this consideration at the end. After his metamorphosis, Gregor feels completely alienated from his room and environment and, as a symbol of this, can't even see his street out the window. The Metamorphosis, then, is a powerful indictment of the alienation brought on by the modern social order.

### **Freedom and escapism**



Gregor is trapped in his job by his duty to his family, but he dreams of the day when he can finally pay off their debts and quit his job. His need for freedom from the restrictive demands of work is expressed in his metamorphosis, by means of which he escapes. This escape, however, fails to bring Gregor freedom, for he is now imprisoned by his family in his room. Thus, when Gregor works, he is enslaved by his job and, when he doesn't work, he is enslaved by his family. There is no way of balancing out freedom and duty, and in the end one is always a slave. The only means of escape turns out to be death.

### Guilt

Guilt stems from family duty, and is Gregor's most powerful emotion. When he is transformed into an insect, Gregor is made unable to work by circumstances beyond his control. Despite the fact that his metamorphosis is not his fault, however, he is racked by guilt every time that the family mentions money or that he thinks about the pain that he has inadvertently inflicted on them by losing the ability to support them. Guilt, it turns out, is deadly, as Gregor realizes at the end that his life is the only thing keeping the family from a better life. He dies for them just as he lived for them: out of guilt.

### Personal identity

Alone in his room, Gregor tries to rebuild the self-identity that he had lost by living entirely for others and ignoring his own needs. He cannot, however, escape from what he sees as his family duty, and continues to act only to serve his family by doing his best not to inconvenience them. Gregor's comments about his family's behavior are often tinged with resentment at the way they treat him, but he will not allow himself to recognize his bitterness. Gregor manages to escape his self-effacing sense of duty only in the last chapter, when he asserts himself in realizing that his family has been neglecting him. Gregor's search for his identity seems hopeless, however, because he never had an identity to start with. He finds his humanity only at the end, when his sister's playing reminds him of his love for his family. This love, coupled with his freedom, is the final ingredient he needs to establish his identity.

## Summary and Analysis of Chapter 1

Gregor Samsa wakes up to find himself transformed into a giant insect. After examining his new physiology, complete with numerous thin legs, a hard back, and a segmented belly, he wonders only momentarily what has happened to him. His attention is quickly distracted as he observes his room, noting its small size and seeing on the wall a picture of a woman he had clipped out of a magazine and framed. Wanting to go back to sleep, Gregor realizes that he cannot turn over on his side, which is the only position he can sleep in.

Gregor then begins thinking about his job as a traveling salesman. He hates the traveling, the worrying, and the fact that none of the acquaintances he makes are ever anything more than that. Then, finding an itch on his stomach, Gregor attempts to scratch it but dislikes the sensation. He goes back to thinking about his job and how much he hates getting up early. His chief is overly tyrannical and Gregor would gladly have quit the job a long time ago if he didn't have to support his parents, who owe his chief a substantial debt.

Wanting to get up and catch the 5 a.m. train, Gregor realizes that it is past 6:30 and he must have missed the alarm. He would certainly be late for work, which would create a scandal, but it would seem suspicious if he called in sick since he had never been sick in the five years he'd worked there. In any case, Gregor feels well, if a little drowsy, and saw no reason why he couldn't go to work. At this point Gregor's mother begins to call to him, and as he answers her he senses that his voice is changing. Realizing that he is still home, his father and sister also begin

calling him through the doors, so Gregor tells them that he is getting up, trying to control the change in his voice, which he believes to indicate the start of a cold. As Gregor's sister attempts to come into his room, he is glad for his habit of locking all his doors.

Unable to control his numerous legs, Gregor instead attempts to move the bottom part of his body out of bed, but this part of his body turns out to be the most difficult to move and is also the most sensitive to pain. He then attempts to move the upper part of his body, which turns out to be easier, but then realizes that falling out of bed like that would injure his head. It is already past 7 a.m., and Gregor attempts to lie back and calm down, hoping this will resolve the situation. Gregor then attempts to rock himself out of bed, hoping to land on his hard back. He thinks that the help of two strong people would make this much easier, but ridicules the idea of calling for help to get him out of bed. At this moment the doorbell rings, and the chief clerk comes into the apartment. Gregor is angered by the fact that, though he is only a little late, already the chief clerk has come to cast suspicion on him in front of the entire family. In anger, Gregor swings himself out of bed, landing on the floor.

Gregor's father asks Gregor to open the door, while his mother is explaining to the chief clerk that Gregor must certainly be ill or he would never be late since he only thinks of his work and never goes out. Gregor refuses the latest request to open the door, and his sister begins to sob in the next room. Gregor cannot understand why his sister is already crying, since he is not yet in serious danger of losing his job and only wants to be left alone. The chief clerk suddenly loses his temper and tells Gregor that he is shocked by his behavior. There has been some suspicion that Gregor was absent from work because he was recently entrusted with some cash payments, and the clerk is now uncertain as to whether this really is the reason for Gregor's behavior. He also tells Gregor that he is acting disgracefully and that his position in the company is in jeopardy because his work lately had been unsatisfactory.

The clerk's speech hits a sore spot, and Gregor begins to defend himself, telling the chief clerk that he is simply suffering from a slight indisposition but that he

will soon be at work and that his business has, in fact, not been so bad lately. No one outside understands a word of what Gregor has said due to the change in his voice. His mother, believing him ill, sends Grete, Gregor's sister, for the doctor and Anna, the servant girl, for the locksmith. Gregor is glad that finally, believing that something is wrong, the others are willing to help him. Placing his faith in the doctor and the locksmith, Gregor nevertheless manages to get to the door and turn the key with his mouth.

At the sight of the large insect, the chief clerk backs away. Gregor's mother faints, while his father clenches his fists and then begins to weep. Gregor begs the chief to give an accurate account of these events at work and to stand up for him. He says that he must provide for his family and that he will gladly go back to work, despite his present difficulty. People in the company often dislike him because he is a traveler and others think he has an easy job, but he insists to the chief clerk that this isn't true and that as a traveler he often finds that others have been gossiping and complaining about him with no foundation in his absence. He begs the chief clerk not to leave without agreeing with him.

The chief clerk continues backing away as Gregor is still speaking. Gregor realizes that if the chief clerk leaves in the state of mind, his job would be in serious danger. He attempts to catch up with the clerk, finally landing on his feet, but then notices that his mother had gotten up. She backs up against the table in fear and tips over the coffee pot. Gregor involuntarily snaps his jaws, frightening her, and she attempts to run away. The commotion gives the chief clerk time to escape down the stairs. Gregor's father picks up a walking stick and waves it while hissing and stamping his feet in order to drive Gregor into his room. Gregor tries to back up but can't, finally attempting to turn around slowly. When he cannot fit through the door and gets stuck, his father pushes him from behind and slams the door behind him.

### Chapter 1: Analysis

Very little can be said about the meanings Kafka actually intended. On the one hand, almost everything he writes can be taken at face value. On the other hand, myriad meanings can be read into his words. The story is written in a strict realist



style, with excessive attention to detail and verisimilitude. With one obvious exception-the protagonist's metamorphosis into a giant insect and his strangely calm reaction to this change-the story is so intricately described that we can almost imagine it happening in real life. Thus, almost nothing takes on any symbolic or metaphorical quality, since every object, action, and word can be seen as contributing to the realistic quality of the style. This attention to detail serves to focus the reader's attention on the one abnormal character-Gregor Samsa-for an understanding of the story's meaning.

The first sentence is intended to shock. In Kafka's view, we are all frozen inside and literature should be the axe that smashes the ice. This first sentence-one of the most famous first sentences in modern literature-certainly breaks the ice. Reading it, we know from the start that we cannot anticipate the events of this story; all our normal expectations of literature are instantly stripped away. The most natural response is to try to understand how Gregor Samsa could have been transformed into an insect overnight, but neither an answer nor any hint at one is offered. Again, our attention is focused on Gregor's response to something that has already happened and that we cannot unravel.

This first sentence of the story achieves something else as well. Kafka's goal is not to suspend the laws of nature. He is, of course, not saying that it is possible for a man to be transformed into an insect. The point, rather, is that literature does not need to honor the laws of nature. The story takes this one completely impossible event and develops logically out of it.

Kafka wrote many stories about animals, but this is the only one where the animal is an insect. It is also the only one where, instead of the animal acting like a human being, it is the human being who is physically transformed into an animal. We are told very little about this insect, except that it has a segmented body, numerous legs, a sensitive bottom, and a few other random and uninformative details. Many commentators and translators have tried to make the insect into a beetle, a cockroach, or a centipede, but such efforts are fruitless and unimportant. The

exact identity of the insect does not matter, and Kafka in fact refused to have an illustration of the actual insect on the cover of the publication.

The traits common to all insects are far more important than the insect's exact identity. Insects are, first of all, viewed as insignificant. To call someone a fly, an ant, or simply an insect is equivalent to saying that they don't matter. Gregor's transformation into an insect, then, can be seen as an attempt on his part to make himself insignificant, or as a reflection of his own pre-existing feeling of insignificance. Insects are also repellant and filthy, something for the exterminator to take care of. Gregor's transformation causes repulsion all around; he is not simply feared and loathed, but actually evokes disgust in others.

Looking around his room as he awakens, long before coming to any real understanding or acceptance of his condition, Gregor notes that it is "a regular human bedroom," though a bit small. In his normal accepting tone, Gregor seems to be expressing dissatisfaction with the size of his room and the conditions in which he lives. The use of the term "regular human" serves already to distance Gregor from everything human. Though he has not yet caught on to his transformation, he already feels removed from humanity. This raises the question of whether this distance is a result of his transformation or indicates his pre-existing distance from other people. No answer, of course, is given, and both are possible. There is a hint here that Gregor's entire metamorphosis may be the result, or the metaphorical equivalent, of his alienation.

On the first page we are informed, in between dashes, that "-Samsa was a commercial traveler-." This fact is introduced in an offhand manner, as something completely unimportant, thus bringing out its importance; understatement is a common literary technique for depicting emphasis. We might note that the narrative sequence in the course of which this fact is introduced is mostly from Gregor's point of view. The fact of his profession is something that he does not consider particularly important. The reduced emphasis on this important information concerning Gregor's profession shows that, for Gregor, his job is not

something he is proud of; it is also something so natural to him that it is hardly worth mentioning.

As a "commercial traveler," or traveling salesman, Gregor belongs to the commercial business world. He is firmly rooted in the new economy that so many modern thinkers have railed against. This economy, where the emphasis is always on money rather than on craftsmanship or on one's humanity, is the world that surrounds Gregor.

Almost at the very beginning we are told of a picture of a lady in fur, hanging up on Gregor's wall. He has cut this picture out of a magazine, framed it, and put it up. It is the only picture in his room that we are told of, and it is mentioned again in Chapter 2 and, also, later on in this chapter when Gregor's mother tells the chief clerk about her son's occupations at home. The emphasis on the picture seems to indicate that it is, somehow, important. As a framed cut-out from a magazine, it also seems as something a little odd to put on one's wall. The picture itself, representing a woman, seems to be a metaphor for an actual love interest for Gregor. He seems to find this picture important (he spent several nights making the frame) because for him it symbolizes women apart from his mother and sister. Gregor is single, and he seems lonely; he remarks that the people he meets while traveling are never more than temporary acquaintances. This picture is his escape from his solitude.

Gregor's consciousness, for the most part, remains very human. His attention is directed mainly towards his surroundings, his job, and his family, not at all towards the fact that he is no longer a human being. He completely fails to realize the importance of his transformation. He is annoyed, for example, that he cannot get back to sleep because he cannot turn over on his side. Gregor, in fact, is the only character who seems, emotionally, fairly unaffected by his metamorphosis. The fourth paragraph of the book reinforces this attitude as, within this single paragraph, Gregor goes from worrying about his job to attempting to scratch an unfamiliar new itch on his unfamiliar new belly. His recognition of his new body does not sink in as he goes on rationally thinking about his work.

Gregor has great difficulty in getting out of bed and opening the door, but constantly excuses this, saying that he is drowsy, that sometimes one wakes up with aches and pains that turn out to be nothing upon getting up, and that he feels a slight indisposition. Once Gregor notes the change in his voice, he attributes this change to the coming on of a cold, still seemingly unaware of his new physical state. In this chapter, Gregor seems to view his metamorphosis as little more than a slight annoyance, something he simply needs to get over before he can get back to work. This gives the impression that Gregor's focus is entirely on his work and his family, to the extent of ignoring his own self.

We get also the impression that Gregor is already alienated from his own body, since the sudden change does not inspire any strong feeling in him. It is as if he has switched from one foreign body to another, less convenient, one. Thus Gregor's strange alienation from his body is given concrete form in his metamorphosis, as he calmly explores his new form. He coolly observes that he cannot control his legs, that he lacks a clear image of the lower part of his body, that he does not know why places on his body itch or what those places are, and he observes, with almost clinical detachment, that he must be damaging his jaw in turning the key since a brown fluid is pouring out. He overestimates the hardness of his back and he experiences aches in unusual places, but none of this really surprises him. Gregor examines his new body as another vessel, just a new shell he has been placed in. It seems almost as if he had never established any identification between his self and his human body, so that a change of form is no big surprise.

Gregor makes it clear that he hates his job. He hates having to worry about traveling plans, he hates that the casual acquaintances he makes never become friends, and most of all he hates the treatment he gets from his boss. The chief is always ready to put him down, forces his workers to speak up to him while he sits behind his desk, and punishes even the smallest indiscretions that other traveling salesmen are allowed to make all the time. Gregor is extremely annoyed by this, and again the theme of alienation is evident, this time of alienation from his job.



Gregor wants to leave it and to tell his chief exactly what he thinks of him, but he realizes that he cannot do so while his family depends on him.

This chapter places a great emphasis on time. Gregor first wants to catch the 5 a.m. train as usual, but then realizes that he has slept until 6:30. He thinks about catching the 7 a.m. train, but isn't sure he can get up in time. When the chief clerk arrives only a short time after the company has opened, Gregor is angered that suspicion is cast on him for wasting only an hour of the firm's time. The passage of time on the clock face is echoed also by the changes taking place outside, as morning fog gives way to clear light, something Gregor notes as the previously hidden hospital across the street comes into view. Time, of course, symbolizes the capitalist order in which time is money and is thus valuable. Oversleeping is a crime because by oversleeping one misses business and thus wastes money. Gregor's mother, speaking with the chief clerk, notes that Gregor thinks of nothing but work and never goes out in the evening. This shows the extent to which the rule of the modern economy weighs down on Gregor: time that is not spent working is useless time, and any activity that is not work is pointless.

The chief clerk tells Gregor's mother that "we men of business-fortunately or unfortunately-very often simply have to ignore any slight indisposition, since business must be attended to." This is the code by which the time-based economy operates. Personal illness is unimportant. What is important is that an ill employee is wasting company money. Business must be attended to at all costs. Gregor, while rebelling against this system, is still a slave to it. The importance of time and the need for work are so ingrained in him that they blind him entirely to his condition. Despite his change, his only driving thought is that he must make it to work. Gregor is thus alienated not only from his job, but also from the entire society, based on capital and running on time. Though he is part of this society, he hates it, resenting the transformation of human beings into automatons and wanting to escape.

We also notice that Gregor always locks his doors, a habit he picked up from traveling. Of course this detail makes sense, logically, in the context of the story. But it serves also to emphasize the distance between Gregor and other human

beings. He notes that he has a habit of locking the doors at night, "even at home." Thus, even at home, Gregor sets up physical barriers between himself and his family, as if he cannot trust them not to come in and must guard himself and his privacy even against those he loves.

Kafka mentions that, hanging on a wall of the living room, is a photograph of Gregor in a military uniform. The mention of this small detail, seemingly unnecessary to the events of the story, serves to point out Gregor's position in the family and society as well as his distance from them. The military is a rite of passage, which makes one into a normal productive member of the social order. Gregor's former membership in the military symbolizes his later membership in the capital economy. But the photograph seems to say something also about Gregor's place in his family. Not only is Gregor a normal and productive member of society, but this is also the ideal image of him that his family keeps on the wall. They care about him and are proud of him so long as he supports and remains within the established order of labor and commerce. This picture of Gregor, "inviting one to respect his uniform and military bearing," thus serves as a strong contrast to Gregor in his insect form, no longer useful to society, nor even a member of it.

Gregor's alienation from everything: his job, the society, his family, humanity, and even his body, is one of the driving themes of the book. Gregor's metamorphosis into an insect with a human consciousness thus serves to concretely illustrate these multiple alienations. He is no longer human, no longer aware of his own body, and no longer able to work. If we return to the angle previously taken, that of his alienation from capitalist economy, we can find another meaning to his transformation specifically into an insignificant and repulsive creature. When money is of primary importance, anyone who does not work becomes unimportant. Gregor, now incapable of making money, has become completely insignificant. He is, in fact, repulsive since he must now be cared for entirely by others and can no longer pay his way. The result of the metamorphosis-Gregor's status as an unproductive member of the capitalist system-is precisely what makes him insignificant and repulsive, i.e., an insect.

We are reminded that Gregor has to hold his job in order to support his family, of which he is the only employed member. Gregor's father, extremely concerned that Gregor continue making money, does not make any himself. This fact is emphasized by the mention that he spends several hours a day at breakfast reading newspapers. Moreover, Gregor's parents are in debt to his chief, and he is working primarily to repay that debt; he has already been working at the firm for five years, and must work another five or six before the debt is repaid. Not only does the rest of the family do no work, relying entirely on Gregor, but they even keep on a servant girl to clean for them.

Though Gregor hates his job, he has to keep it, and he must keep this specific job and cannot change because of the debts. Gregor's value to his family is thus primarily a financial one, so that family relations are here reduced to economic worth. While Gregor's parents and his sister are bound to each other by more traditional family ties, his relation to them is redefined in terms of the new economy in the way that Marx and Engels had described. Gregor is thus a virtual slave of his family, forced into hated labor for their welfare, and there seems to be little sign that the rest are trying to pitch in and help. He seems, however, to feel no bitterness. On the contrary, Gregor's primary feeling is one of guilt.

Though Gregor personally does not express any sentiment against his family, several clues in this chapter are dropped to tip us off as to the nature of his relation to them. When Gregor's voice through the door can no longer be understood, his mother becomes worried and instantly sends for the doctor. Gregor observes that "people now believed that something was wrong with him, and were ready to help him." He does not seem to notice the opposite side of this, which was that before it was clear that anything was seriously wrong, his family seemed to be concerned only that he was late to work. When Gregor emerges from his room to show the others what has happened to him, his father at first clenches his fists and appears hostile, then breaks down and weeps. It is not at all clear that the father is actually concerned for his son. He seems, rather, to be concerned for their livelihood, and when Gregor emerges in a form clearly unfit for work, his father at first seems simply to be angry with him as if Gregor were



playing hooky. The father's reaction, a transition from anger to grief, is the same he would likely have had if Gregor had simply announced that he had quit his job.

When Gregor refuses to leave his room, his sister begins sobbing in the next room. In response, Gregor thinks that there is no need for this weeping because he is not yet in serious danger of losing his job and has no intention of "deserting the family." That Gregor imagines his sister's concern is purely over financial matters says much about the relations between the members of the family. Gregor is perfectly aware that the others see him as an ox: a commodity that is valuable for the money it brings in.

Yet Gregor clearly feels guilt, completely failing to realize that the situation is out of his hands. His concern is to get to work and to make his excuses for being late, and his primary realization is that he must hold on to his job for the sake of his family. He fails to recognize that his difficulty in getting out of bed, opening the door, and heading to work is the result of a metamorphosis for which he is not responsible. Instead, he blames his drowsiness, attempts to excuse it by saying he feels somewhat indisposed, and continues thinking that he can still make it, if only a few hours late. The point is not that Gregor cannot recognize what happened to him because he is dull-witted, but rather that his guilt is externalized to such an extent that he feels anything that delays his arrival at work and prevents his ability to make money must be his own fault. The metamorphosis is something that he himself is not responsible for and so he cannot feel guilty for it; thus he ignores the real reason for his tardiness and invents other reasons for which he can blame himself.

But Gregor also wants to escape from his guilt, and he secretly hopes that he will be able to do so. Before opening his door, he is eager to see the others' reaction to his transformation. "If they were horrified," he thinks, "then the responsibility was no longer his and he could stay quiet." But, almost unwilling to believe that he could escape so easily, Gregor notes also that "if they took it calmly, then he had no reason either to be upset, and could really get to the station for the eight-o'clock train." Gregor's guilt-and his need to feel it-is so strong that he cannot



simply accept even the most obvious way out of that guilt: his metamorphosis, a circumstance that clearly relieves him of all responsibility.

The notion of guilt that Gregor seems to experience is similar to the Biblical notion of original sin. Adam and Eve ate the apple, but it is the rest of humanity that carries the guilt. Just as in Biblical lore all human beings are guilty-at least before the coming of Christ-of a sin they have no control over, so Gregor is guilty due to a metamorphosis beyond his control.

Gregor's family in this chapter is introduced only very briefly, primarily through their voices outside his door. The family is based on the model established by Sigmund Freud and mirroring Kafka's own, with a clearly dominant father who subjugates the son to his will through authority and strength. When he seeks to drive the insect Gregor back into his room, he begins stamping and hissing. Gregor notes that "the noise in his rear sounded no longer like the voice of one single father." His father has become something greater than a human being, a force that drives him forward in sheer terror. Freud's identification of the father with God is symbolically repeated here as Gregor's father chases him back into his room with a walking stick. This gesture, driving Gregor out of the living room and the company of the family, "the human circle," resembles the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden with a flaming sword. This scene is repeated, in a slightly different form, in the second chapter.

Gregor is unable to comprehend his situation also because he is used to resolving problems rationally. Small problems that arise in life can usually be solved with fairly little difficulty, and the larger problems of life are ordinarily ignored. Thus Gregor, in the past, could always ignore the problem of his alienation and never do anything to fix it. Suddenly, however, he is faced with this problem in a concrete form and he "saw no way of bringing any order into this arbitrary confusion." This arbitrary confusion is a metaphor for Gregor's life, and life in general, where our ability to bring order into everyday situations only masks our inability to control the big picture. Unable to grasp this, Gregor attempts to lie back and relax, still believing in "cool reflection" as something that can restore things "to their real

and normal condition." The metamorphosis, then, forces Gregor to face the insolvable problem of his life.

The climax of this chapter seems to be Gregor's speech to the chief clerk as the latter is attempting to leave the apartment. He begs the clerk to stand up for him, insisting that he is extremely dedicated and loyal and that he must provide for his family. He mentions also that travelers are disliked in the office and slandered behind their backs. He makes excuses, though at this point no excuses are necessary or helpful, and insists that he will get out of his difficulty and will work even harder when he returns. Gregor's plea is utterly sincere, expressing his guilt, his desire to rejoin the economic order, and tinged with his distaste for that order, touching at once on the main themes of the book. This speech is important, also, for its absolute futility, since Gregor knows perfectly well that the chief clerk can no longer understand what he is saying and, furthermore, since even were he understood, it would make no difference at all.

Gregor hates his job and wishes to escape it. His metamorphosis has given him the ability to do so. Finally, he can leave his job and the social order he dislikes, he can lie around in his room without concern for time and for debts. And yet he cannot accept his freedom because his guilt is stronger than the desire to escape. Gregor is torn, and his speech to the chief clerk shows him trying to plead his way out of his guilt and his freedom.

This is the fundamental crisis that Gregor, as so many human beings in the modern age, must face. This crisis is the conflict between freedom and one's responsibility to oneself on one side, and guilt and the demands posed by society and family on the other. Both sets of values are essential for human beings, but the clash between them is often obscured. Perhaps this conflict is obscured for the best, because there seems to be no way out of it. One cannot be free without guilt, yet one cannot fulfill one's obligation to others and remain true to oneself.

If escape from this predicament is impossible, then Kafka, with his metamorphosis, provides an impossible escape. By becoming an insect, Gregor gains both his freedom and the right to avoid guilt, since his freedom is forced on him. Maybe this transformation happened randomly on its own, or maybe Gregor willed it on himself; that isn't important. What matters is that this transformation is the only escape from the trap that Gregor is caught in. And, since the trap is primarily a psychological one, the escape is physical. Gregor is changed into an insect. This metamorphosis seems to end his conflict.

### **Summary and Analysis of Chapter 2**

At twilight Gregor wakes up, believing that he heard the noise of someone entering and leaving his room. He realizes that his body is badly bruised from being shoved through the door earlier that day. Suddenly Gregor smells food, which his sister had left for him, near the door and moves toward it, discovering that it contains bread floating in milk, which used to be his favorite drink. He discovers, however, that he finds milk repulsive and cannot drink it.

Gregor notices that his father is not reading the paper out loud to the family as usual and there is complete silence in the apartment. He hears the doors to his room being opened and quickly shut, and decides to try to persuade someone to come in the next time this happens, but the doors are kept locked now and no one will enter. Realizing that he feels uncomfortable in the center of his room, Gregor climbs under the couch. He considers that he must do his best to help the family deal with the current predicament.

Gregor's sister comes in and, seeing he is under the sofa, takes away the milk. Instead, she brings various items to see which of them he will eat. She leaves and Gregor comes out, discovering that he cannot eat fresh food at all, but only the spoiled cheese and vegetables. His sister returns, throws away everything he didn't eat, and leaves, while Gregor hides under the couch despite the discomfort (his body is swollen from eating) in order to spare her the unpleasantness of having

to see all of him. His sister continues feeding him after that at times when his parents were asleep and the servant girl was away.

No one talks to Gregor because they assume that he cannot understand what they say. He has to learn everything only by listening to conversations taking place outside his door. The family discusses him a lot, especially since there are always at least two people at home since no one wants to be left alone with him in the apartment. The cook, finding out about Gregor's metamorphosis, begs to be allowed to leave and is dismissed.

From listening to conversations, Gregor discovers that his family doesn't eat much. His father explained the financial situation to the family, and would occasionally use money he had saved from his old business, which had collapsed. Gregor had not known about this money. When his father's business has fallen apart, he had thrown himself into his work and advanced in his job so as to be able to provide for his family. He remembers those times happily, but also recalls that after the initial happiness, the family became used to having him provide for them. He retained a strong bond only with his sister, and wanted to use the money he made to send her to the Conservatory to study the violin.

Gregor has to watch his movements very carefully, because if he makes any noise, his family will hear through the door and will become concerned. From listening to their conversations, Gregor learns that in addition to money left over from his father's business, the family had also saved a good deal of Gregor's salary that had been put aside. Gregor knows that he could have used the money to pay off the debt to his chief and leave his job earlier, but he agrees that his father's planning was best since it now left the family with some money. It was not enough to live on for more than two years at most, and should be reserved for an emergency. Every time money is mentioned, Gregor feels extremely ashamed.

Gregor enjoys looking out the window, as he finds this reminds him of how much he used to enjoy looking out the window before his metamorphosis. But he finds that his vision is getting worse, so that he can no longer make out the houses in his



street. His sister runs through his room every time she comes in so as to open the window, as if she cannot stand to be in the room with him without the window open. Her running bothers him. When he realizes how much his appearance must upset her, Gregor figures out a way to cover himself with a sheet so that she cannot see him at all while she is in the room.

Gregor's parents do not come into his room, and his sister reports on his activities to them after she cleans the room every day. Gregor's mother eventually begs to see him, but the others hold her back even though she begs to be let in. Gregor thinks that he wants to see his mother because she can understand things better than his sister. In the meantime, Gregor had discovered, as he was losing interest in eating and found lying down all night doing nothing boring, that he enjoyed climbing on the walls and ceiling. Noticing this by the tracks he left, his sister decides to remove all his furniture to give him more room. Since the servant girl is afraid and Grete does not want to ask her father for help, she instead asks her mother. They come into the room, but find moving the chest of drawers very difficult. Gregor's mother suggests that if they were to remove all his furniture, it would look to him as though they had given up on his recovery. Gregor, hearing his mother's voice, realizes that he does want to keep his furniture since, even though it constrains his motion, it keeps him linked to his past. Gregor decides that he has to save his furniture.

The movement of the furniture and the women's walking around the room distracts Gregor. When they are momentarily outside, he crawls out from under the sofa and decides that he has to protect the picture of the woman in fur hanging on his wall. He climbs up on the wall and sticks to the picture. Grete and her mother come in and, when they see Gregor, his mother faints. Grete runs out to get some medicine to revive her and Gregor, wanting to help, follows. When she turns around and sees Gregor behind her, Grete drops a bottle of the medicine and runs into his room, locking him out. Gregor's father soon comes home to discover that Gregor has left his room and caused his mother to faint. Gregor, trapped in the living room by the locked door to his own room, cannot escape his father who chases him around the room and then begins throwing apples at him. One of the apples sinks into Gregor's

back, causing him such pain that he can't move. As he loses consciousness, Gregor sees his mother running to his father and begging him to spare her son's life.

## Chapter 2: Analysis

Gregor awakens at twilight, the moment when darkness is just covering the last light of day. Thus, the fact that Gregor has now been cut off from humanity is emphasized by the fact that he awakens in darkness. He has been isolated from everyone, a situation also brought out by the fact that his family now locks his doors from the outside and walks around on tip-toe so as to remain undetected by him.

Gregor's sister still retains the strong bond they had before his metamorphosis, as she assumes all responsibility for cleaning his room. Grete's attachment to her brother is demonstrated by her choice of food for him: milk, which used to be his favorite drink. It is also Grete who comes up with the idea of clearing Gregor's room of furniture so as to give him more space to move around in. Grete attempts to care for Gregor in the same way he used to care for her, but she seems driven by family duty rather than a true human bond, as we see from the fact that she never addresses Gregor directly except on one occasion when she turns to threaten him. Grete seems to think that Gregor cannot understand her, though he gives clear signals (somehow invisible to her) of his intelligence and concern for her.

Gregor will do anything to avoid causing her distress, and she realizes this; knowing that he will not eat in front of her, for example, she locks the door to let him know he can come out of hiding. She is very considerate in bringing him food, trying to find out what he likes by bringing him a selection of things to choose from, but at the same time treats him like a stranger: she throws away even the food he hasn't touched, picks up his bowl with a cloth rather than bare hands, and enters his room on tip-toe, "as if she were visiting an invalid or even a stranger."

Gregor, in a fascinating manner fails to see the significance of events around him. His family tip-toes around the house and stays up late without talking. Gregor notes that his father has stopped reading the newspaper aloud to the others after dinner. He recounts these factual events in detail, never stopping to consider that they are related to directly to his metamorphosis. Gregor's isolation is evident from this inability to understand the significance of his family's behavior, taking their actions for granted without inquiring as to the reasons for these actions.

Feeling pride for having been able to provide so well for his family, Gregor manages to temporarily escape his guilt. Pride, in fact, is the positive side of guilt since one feels pride upon doing a job well and guilt upon failing. Thus Gregor's dominant emotion switches from pride to guilt once he is no longer able to care for his family.

Gregor's alienation from his environment is something that has not changed with his metamorphosis. Whereas earlier he had thought that his room was too small, now he thinks it is a "lofty, empty room," altogether too big for his needs. In this way Gregor's room, which he has lived in for years, has never felt like home to him but rather as some foreign place in which he found himself.

Gregor sets out to "meditate at his leisure on how he was to arrange his life afresh." These meditations, however, bring him nowhere, since he is unable to escape the self-effacing guilt and duty that have been ruling his life up to now. The metamorphosis, which should have aided a psychological transformation, has still left him trapped in the grip of the same emotions that had held him in check during his whole previous life. We can see this in the pains Gregor takes to help his family deal with the "inconvenience he was bound to cause them in his present condition." Gregor's need to escape his previous life is something that he could never justify to himself, and he retains his disregard for his own well being for the sake of others. He says he would rather starve to death than show his sister that he is

hungry, suppressing his impulse to beg her for food in order to avoid inconveniencing her.

Gregor has to watch his movements carefully. If he drops his head, this bothers his family, and so he tries to put his head down carefully. He tries to do everything possible not to bother them. Even though he has been freed from his economic imprisonment, he has become a prisoner in a different way. Literally, he has been locked in, and he off-handedly mentions "his imprisonment." But psychologically he also remains a slave, since he must monitor every move out of concern for his family. Gregor's new prison seems even worse than his old one, though this one is unbearable only because of his own need to serve his family. Gregor is crushed by his inability to help them; hearing them mention money, he "threw himself down on the cool leather sofa, he felt so hot with shame and grief."

When Gregor climbs under the couch, he does so in order to spare his family the pain of having to see him. His hiding, however, is an escapist move. It was escapism that seems to have brought on his metamorphosis, allowing him to find freedom from work. Now, enslaved by his feelings of duty to his family, he attempts to escape these by hiding under the couch and out of the way.

The couch also plays a role in demonstrating Gregor's isolation. Gregor's link with humanity is shattered when no one thinks of attempting to communicate with him directly. The family does not speak to him, and he learns of what is happening only by voyeuristically listening in on their conversations. The couch intensifies this voyeuristic aspect when Gregor surreptitiously watches his sister from behind a sheet while hiding under it.

To understand the nature of Gregor's psychological self-imprisonment, we need to look at the perfectly justified resentment building within Gregor, which he tries to suppress at all costs. Gregor notes that his family had wanted to come in when he wanted privacy upon waking after his metamorphosis, but now that he wanted



company they would not come in. There is a clear trace of bitterness in Gregor's apprehension of this fact, but he can't admit that to himself.

Noting that his parents never enter his room to bring him food, he observes: "not that they would have wanted him to starve, of course, but perhaps they could not have borne to know more about his feeding than from hearsay." They care about him, but can't stand the thought of him. Though Gregor realizes that it is natural for them to be repulsed by his form, he still wishes that they would not treat him with such neglect.

Gregor's relationship with his sister also seems tinged with resentment at times. She consistently does things to cause him discomfort: she runs through his room to open the window and she does not remove the sheet he uses to hide himself from her. Gregor assumes that, since she must realize that these things annoy him, she would not do them unless they were necessary. But Gregor cannot observe all this without feeling bitterness at no longer being treated as a member of the family. This is brought out by the differences between the ways the siblings treat each other. Gregor hides under the couch even when this is extremely uncomfortable and is willing to do four hours of work to cover himself with the blanket just so she won't have to see him. She, on the other hand, does not make such sacrifices, but rather attempts to do everything that duty demands of her in a way that would not put her to the trouble of actually having to deal with Gregor.

The relation with his parents is also somewhat strained, and has been so since before the metamorphosis. Gregor was happy to provide for them, but there was no "special uprush of warm feeling" once they got used to his providing the money. They got used, essentially, to his function as a cash dispenser. He retained a human familial relation only with his sister. Gregor clearly feels slighted by the fact that his parents began to see him as a provider and took this for granted.

This slighted resentment, already present, is increased by the discoveries Gregor makes by listening to his family's conversations. He finds out that his father had

some money left after the collapse of his business, something he had previously not been told. He had believed his family was desolate, and so had given up his life to work in order to make money for them. He had been placed into servitude for the family automatically, without being informed of the actual financial situation.

Gregor had given his parents all the money he earned instead of paying off his father's debts to his boss so he could quit his job, something Gregor was extremely eager to do. He discovers that not all of the money was needed at the time, and that his parents had managed to save a fair amount by putting aside some of the money he gave them. Though Gregor thinks that "doubtless it was better the way his father had arranged it," but there is clear resentment in this. If the idea of paying off the debts had not appealed to him, he would not have mentioned it. Once again, this is a case where Gregor represses his feelings of resentment out of a sense of duty to his family. The denial of this resentment of his family is part of the psychological prison Gregor now inhabits.

Gregor finds that he likes to look out the window, "obviously in some recollection of the sense of freedom that looking out of a window always used to give him." But this desire for freedom is something that Gregor experienced in the past; it seems to have left him. Freedom is a human need and Gregor has been brought to the state of being inhuman, where he cannot even recognize his loss of freedom.

Crawling around the walls and ceiling symbolizes Gregor's freedom from the responsibility of work. He says that on the wall, "one could breathe more freely. . . [in] blissful absorption." At these times, spending his days crawling around the room instead of working as before, Gregor recaptures some of that freedom he had hoped for. But this freedom is an inhuman freedom of his body, and his human mind remains imprisoned. Gregor's loss of sight is a metaphor for this loss of freedom, even more acute than the loss he had suffered before when he spent his life working. He can no longer see what is around him and thus can no longer dream of being free as he used to when staring out the window.

This loss of sight also has another meaning. In the Greek play *Oedipus Rex*, Oedipus puts out his own eyes after he discovers that he inadvertently killed his own father. Gregor also feels that, by not working, he is committing a crime against his father. And he feels that his resentment, although he does his best to repress it, is also an offense against his father. His loss of sight is a punishment for this crime.

Gregor notices that his sister has gained a lot of confidence as a result of having to take care of him. Like Gregor, who once worked for his family out of duty in order to feel pride and avoid guilt, Grete now attempts to do the same in fulfilling her duty to Gregor. The narrator notes that she is tempted to "exaggerate the horror of her brother's circumstances in order that she might do all the more for him." Grete is now a prisoner to duty just like Gregor used to be, and she deals with this situation by attempting to make herself feel pride in her fulfillment of that duty. When Grete invents the idea of clearing Gregor's room of furniture to give him more space to move around in, she is clearly very proud of herself.

Gregor remembers his sister's ability to "play movingly" on the violin. This memory links him to his humanity, where art seemed important. This memory is one of the few that Gregor hits on in an attempt to reestablish the bond with his humanity, lost years ago when he entered the workforce. Gregor had planned to use his earnings to send his sister to the Conservatory, though this was extremely expensive. Not even art is free from the alienation brought on by capitalism, since the development of Grete's talent requires Gregor to surrender his freedom.

Hearing his mother's voice near him for the first time since his metamorphosis, Gregor is reminded of his humanity. Her words and her presence bring back to him the feeling of relatedness to his surroundings, and he realizes that his furniture is an essential part of his humanity. Gregor desperately wants to hold on to this and, when he has to make a quick decision about what to protect in his room, instantly seizes on the framed picture hanging up on his wall.

The picture clearly symbolizes Gregor's link with his humanity, but different interpretations of this picture are possible. The picture of a pretty woman may represent women in general, along with the possibility of human relationships. In the first chapter, Gregor's relationship with a magazine cut-out, rather than a real person, demonstrated his alienation from human beings. Now, this picture seems to offer him the opposite, a way out of that alienation. The element of his lover interest being taken away and symbolically replaced by his mother and sister is founded on psychoanalytic theories, where the desire for incest is the most primitive and most animal urge found in human beings. Some critics have pointed out that the picture, showing a woman largely concealed in fur as if she is turning into an animal, symbolizes Gregor's own metamorphosis. This picture then represents the personal human identity he has lost, and he asserts himself for the first time in the novel in opposition to his family in order to preserve his identity.

The glass of the picture is mentioned twice here. First, it is comforting to his hot belly, but it acts as a reminder that he can never possess the picture. The glass separates them. His humanity is out of reach. Yet the second mention of the glass is when Gregor finds that he is stuck to it. His humanity, though it seems out of reach, is also something he cannot entirely let go of.

Gregor's desire to establish his self-identity, which he has so far been steadily effacing for the sake of his family, leads to his first self-interested act of the novel. For the first time he crawls out into plain view despite the knowledge of the disturbance this will cause to the others. Not only is Gregor willing to come out of hiding, but he is also aggressively determined to defend the picture on the wall. He says that he "would rather fly in Grete's face" than let her take the picture. Suddenly, tired of constantly ignoring his own needs and desires to avoid inconveniencing his family, Gregor is prepared to defend his link to his humanity, from which he draws his newfound assertiveness.

Gregor describes the change in his father's appearance in great detail. The old man who used to lie around lazily and feebly now stands tall, dressed in a uniform and with his hair neatly brushed. Gregor's father, so much stronger than he once



was, is now the proper symbol of authority that Kafka's father figures tend to be. The father is a power that emerges from behind an old and weak-looking body to dominate and threaten the son. And so, at the moment when Gregor suddenly recognizes his humanity and puts his self-interest before his consideration for his family, his father bursts in to put him back down with the power of his authority.

In the first chapter we witnessed Mr. Samsa driving Gregor out of the paradise of his family, the living room, with the aid of a stick, symbolic of the fiery sword used to drive Adam and Eve out of Eden and into the world of guilt. This guilt, which human beings had to bear because Adam and Eve tasted the apple, now comes back against Gregor. By asserting himself against consideration for his family and in order to find his humanity, Gregor plays the role of Adam, who became human by tasting the apple of good and evil in opposition to God's command. When Adam asserted himself against God by eating the apple, he was punished. A similar scene is played out here, with all the same symbols clearly in place. Any act against the family, such as Gregor has just taken, is an act against the authority of the father, the God figure in regard to Gregor. Gregor is tortured by guilt, also the result of Adam's having eaten the apple. And Gregor's father appears to punish him for his transgression by throwing at him the same apples that Adam used against God. This scene, with Gregor's father pursuing him with the apples, is like the God of Genesis throwing the apples that were used against him back at Adam.

Finally, Gregor's mother appears and begs her husband to spare Gregor. Earlier, she had asked to see Gregor, insisting that "he is my unfortunate son I must go to him." Mrs. Samsa still feels something more than simple duty, something that has been brought out in her by the family's tragedy. She remembers that Gregor is her son and, though he has been changed into an insect, she still feels love for him. This leads into the third chapter, where the family attempts to treat Gregor with more familial kindness.

### **Summary and Analysis of Chapter 3**

Gregor's injury cripples him so that he finds it difficult to move around and can no longer climb walls. As a result, however, his father realizes that Gregor should be treated as part of the family and not as an enemy, and the family now leaves the door to his bedroom open so that he can watch them sitting around the table while he remains hidden in the dark. The interactions of the family are very quiet, however. After dinner, his father falls asleep while in his armchair while still wearing his uniform, which has become dirty. His mother sews and his sister, who has taken a job as a salesgirl, studies French and shorthand. Every night Grete and her mother struggle to get the father into bed.

Everyone is too tired to care much about Gregor. They let the servant girl go and instead hire on a charwoman to come in twice a day and do the difficult work. The family was forced to sell off their ornaments and wanted to move to a smaller apartment but couldn't because they couldn't think of a way to move Gregor. Gregor, however, believes that the family simply doesn't have the strength to move; they have reconciled themselves to suffering misfortune. Every evening Grete sits with her mother and they close the door of Gregor's room.

Gregor begins remembering people from his past life and thinking about the fact that they were now removed from him and would not help him or his family. Gregor also starts thinking less about his family and more about the way they are neglecting him. His sister doesn't bother to pick out his food any more and cleans his room very hastily and poorly. She insists, however, in being the only one to clean his room and, when his mother does this once, Grete yells at her starting a fight with the father who reprimands them both. Gregor is angry that they did not close his door to spare him the noise. The charwoman discovers Gregor but isn't repulsed by him. She talks to Gregor, calling him to her with names that annoy him. He does not respond until one time when she annoyed him too much and he ran at her, at which point she threatened him with a chair until he retreated.

Gregor's room becomes a storage area for junk. The family takes on three lodgers who bring their own furnishings, so everything that isn't needed is tossed into Gregor's room. He finds that he has little space to move and enjoys shifting the garbage around. The bearded lodgers are extremely scrupulous about cleanliness and order and attempt to arrange the apartment so that nothing unnecessary is lying around. Because the lodgers usually eat at the apartment, the door to Gregor's room is often kept closed. Even when it is opened, however, he often ignores it. He also stops eating almost entirely.

One day the charwoman leaves Gregor's door ajar while the lodgers are in the living room. His mother and sister bring in food for them and they inspect it carefully before eating. The family now eats in the kitchen. Then Gregor's father comes in and bows to the lodgers. Gregor, watching them chew, realizes that he is starving to death because, lacking teeth, he cannot eat human food. Grete begins playing the violin in the kitchen and the lodgers ask her to come into the living room to play. His parents remain standing until the lodgers offer the mother a chair. The lodgers, after listening for a short while, move over to the window and begin whispering to show they are no longer interested and are disappointed with the performance. Gregor, however, is drawn by it. Despite being covered with dirt from his room, he crawls out, fantasizing about bringing his sister back into his room, making her play for him, and then confiding that he had planned to send her to the Conservatory.

The lodgers notice Gregor and stare at him with amusement. His father attempts to drive them back into their room, but they stop on the threshold and the middle lodger, whom the others apparently look up to, announces that he is giving notice and will not pay for the days he has lived there because of the disgusting conditions in the household. The other lodgers also give notice before retreating into their room. At this point Gregor's sister steps forward and forcefully tells her parents that they have looked after the creature long enough and must now get rid of it. She bursts out crying. The father asks how they could get rid of it, and Grete has no answer. She ridicules the idea that Gregor can understand them and insists that, if this were really Gregor, he would have gone away on his own and

left them alone. She claims that the creature is persecuting them and wants to drive them out of the apartment into the gutter.

When Gregor attempts to turn around, Grete panics. Finally, he manages to crawl back painfully to his room and his sister slams the door shut behind him and locks it. Gregor, remembering his tenderness and love for his family, realizes that he has to disappear. He agrees fully with his sister. He dies as the dawn is rising.

The charwoman arrives the next day and realizes that Gregor is dead. She announces this fact to the family. They thank God and then retreat to the parents' bedroom to grieve. When the lodgers come out and find there is no breakfast for them, they begin to complain but the charwoman shows them the corpse. At this point Mr. Samsa emerges and tells the lodgers to leave. They attempt a resistance, but his forcefulness intimidates them and they quickly depart.

The family decides to take a walk together and they write notes to their employers. The charwoman, annoying them by standing around, finally informs them that the corpse has been disposed of. As she leaves, slamming the door, Mr. Samsa announces that he will dismiss her in the evening. The mother and Grete then stand by the window, but Mr. Samsa summons them and they depart. They take the tram out of town to go to the country and, on the way, decide that the future does not look bad as their jobs are all likely to lead to better ones and they will soon be able to find a new apartment that is smaller and easy to manage, unlike the one Gregor had picked for them. Mr. and Mrs. Samsa suddenly realize that their daughter has become very pretty and that it is time to look for a husband for her. As their tram arrives, she is the first to jump to her feet and stretch.

### Chapter 3: Analysis

The third chapter deals primarily with the conflict between Gregor and his family as it climbs toward a climax. The family attempts to accept him, but this



acceptance is bound up with the alienation that the family feels as a result of their work. Gregor becomes a symbol of the dehumanizing nature of work and, as the family attempts to accept him, they find themselves becoming more and more dehumanized until they can't take it any more. Their attempt at accepting Gregor, then, turns to bitter rejection of him.

First off, we find Gregor's emergence from voyeurism to simulated family life. Having seriously injured Gregor, his father at last takes pity on him. Gregor's sister, who has been caring for him all along, and his mother, who clearly loves her son, had already taken the step towards accepting him which his father now undertakes. It is significant that the father is willing to accept the son only by crippling him in a display of his power. Now that his son has been subdued and thus seems to no longer pose a threat, he can be accepted as part of the family. They keep his door open, allowing him to observe them.

Gregor notes that the family is not as lively as they used to be, when he would dream about them in hotel rooms. He misses the irony in this, which is that his family could live happily and cheerfully only so long as Gregor remained isolated in hotel rooms, that is, only so long as he continued working and they were all free to do nothing. Though the family's pervasive depression is obviously a result of Gregor's metamorphosis, the same thing would have happened if Gregor had simply stopped working without such a good excuse. The family could retain its close bonds and human relations only at the cost of alienating their son.

Mr. Samsa, always in uniform, looks "as if he were ready for service at any moment and even here only at the beck and call of his superior." He has been reincorporated into the work force, and has lost his own volition; he is, instead, always a slave to his job even when he is at home. The brass buttons on his uniform, always polished, represent his absorption into the dehumanizing capitalist system. They contrast with his dirty uniform, which symbolizes the degradation of the individual human core behind that socially useful and servile façade. Just as humanity decays behind the privations of a thankless and exhausting job, so the uniform becomes covered with greasy stains behind the shining brass buttons.

In the uniform, Mr. Samsa sleeps "in extreme discomfort and yet quite peacefully." The uniform, symbol of the economic order, causes discomfort and loss of individuality. The individual, by ignoring his own humanity and sacrificing himself entirely to the economic order, can feel "at peace" at the cost of no longer being human.

As a result of Gregor's escape from the economic order, his family has been drafted into it. All of them now have dehumanizing jobs. His father serves low clerks, his mother "devoted her energy to making underwear for strangers," and his sister has to obey customers and run around behind a counter. This is the justification for Gregor's self-sacrifice before his metamorphosis. He alone was able to provide for his family so that, though he lost his humanity, the three of them could retain theirs. The well-being of the greater number was dependent on Gregor's lonely suffering.

Grete and her mother attempt, despite their alienation resulting from their jobs. This is the last attempt of human beings to maintain a true family in the face of the dehumanization they face. The father with his brass buttons, and Gregor, who symbolizes this alienation threatening them, are not allowed into their relationship and are expelled as the father is put to bed and the door to Gregor's room is shut.

As the entire family takes over Gregor's duty of working thankless jobs and worrying about the future, he resents society. Remembering the people from his past, Gregor mourns that none of them will now help his family, who have been abandoned with no one to aid them. The family has been isolated in the same way that Gregor had been abandoned while he was the sole breadwinner. In these memories from Gregor's past, we finally see mention of romance, the girls "wooed earnestly but too slowly." Gregor's recalling and regret for his past failures color his final move out of the human domain.

Gregor's accepting and self-sacrificing attitude is gradually replaced by anger. His family neglects him and, when they fight, he is upset that they are causing noise rather than being interested in the actual event and the fact that his family is arguing about him. The significance of the event is now lost to him; only its direct effect on him is noted. Gregor is no longer bothered by guilt or by duty. His prison now is only physical: his injury will not allow him to move and the family still keeps him in his room and neglects him more and more as they are too busy working to pay any attention to him. Now, finally abandoning his guilt, Gregor is able to see the way that the family treats him. He invents plans to steal food from the larder and loses concern for the family's well-being.

The family is clearly falling apart, Gregor included. They don't talk to each other except to fight, and they seem to care for each other only insofar as they all need to be healthy and to get enough sleep in order to work the next day. They are becoming alienated from each other in the same way that Gregor was alienated at the beginning when only he was working. This is echoed on the other side by the fact that his sister doesn't bother to choose food for him or to properly clean his room. And the disintegration of family life is accompanied by the disintegration of Gregor's body, starving to death amid dirt, the apple still rotting in his back.

As part of the change, Gregor has moved from under the sofa to lying on top of it. But this no longer bothers anyone as they are all too tired even to be repulsed by Gregor. And while the repulsion he received after his metamorphosis was painful to him, he is now treated with something even worse: apathy. His sister, he notices, can see the dirt in his room perfectly, but she no longer bothers to clean it. Once Gregor's mother attempts to show her love for her son by cleaning the room, but when a fight breaks out and Mr. Samsa insists that she should leave it to Grete, and that Grete should not clean the room any more, complete apathy is restored.

Gregor now gladly accepts his isolation. When the door to his room is left closed, this doesn't bother him at all. He has lost interest in his family. Even when the door is left open, he often simply ignores it. Gregor ignores his body as well, letting himself starve to death and spending his days lying on the floor. The apathy of the

family has also infected him, and he can no longer be bothered to care about others or himself. When the charwoman attempts to be friendly to Gregor, this only annoys him and he attempts to rush at her to scare her off. His previous desire for human contact has been completely eliminated, though he occasionally takes a vague interest in events outside his door.

The family's relation to the lodgers is another strange episode of the novel. The lodgers, though the family views them as gentlemen, are clearly only caricatures of proper human beings. They are rude and domineering, and care far more about order and cleanliness than about human beings. Their obsession with putting everything in its place and not tolerating dirt invites a contrast with Gregor who, an insect lying in a room full of junk and dirt, is still more human than they are.

The family, seeing the lodgers as another source of money, is subservient to them at all times, bowing to them, not sitting in their presence, waiting until they inspect their food, and so on. Mr. Samsa, when he fears that Grete's violin playing is bothering the lodgers, is instantly willing to stop it immediately for their pleasure. In this way, the family is imprisoned in their own home. While, in the past, they could return home from the dehumanizing experience of work and relax together, now they can never relax and are always servants, whether at work or home.

There is an interesting passage where Gregor observes the lodgers eating. "I'm hungry enough but not for that kind of food. How these lodgers are stuffing themselves, and here am I dying of starvation." In the text, this thought is explained by the comment that Gregor cannot chew with toothless jaws. But there is an underlying message here. Gregor does not name the food he is hungry for. We can also notice that he stops eating at about the time when Grete begins to neglect him. Gregor is looking for a nourishment other than food; he wants attention and love, something that he has now been cut off from.

When Grete begins to play the violin in the living room, something stirs in Gregor. As he crawls out of his room drawn by the sound, "he felt hardly any surprise at



his growing lack of consideration for the others; there had been a time when he prided himself on being considerate." Gregor's lack of consideration, however, is only a somewhat belated response to his family's lack of consideration for him. Having been treated with neglect, he now neglects them in return, crawling out of the room in plain view of everyone. Gregor is now free: not only does he not have to work, but he is also no longer bothered by guilt. As an insect, he doesn't seem to need much more freedom than that. He has finally escaped all the traps that had been set for him. And yet something is clearly missing from his life, consumed as it is by apathy.

Gregor poses a question: "was he an animal, that music had such an effect on him?" Ironically, the answer to this seems to be no. The lodgers rudely move away from Grete and whisper among themselves by the window. The parents are too busy watching the lodgers with anxiety to pay attention to Grete's playing. Gregor, however, is drawn to the music. The sound he hears returns him to his humanity, reminding him of his love for his sister and his desire to send her to the Conservatory. Realizing that the others don't appreciate her playing, he wants to bring her into his room and make her play for him, rekindling the bond they once had. Though Gregor is literally an animal, he is the only one who understands and feels the redeeming power of art. When he hears the violin, his past and his love for his sister come back to him. Art saves him from his apathy, reminding him of what he has been missing despite his freedom: family. Unlike the insect Gregor, in whom music brings out the best, it is the others, in failing to appreciate art, that are something less than human.

It is clear that the music has touched Gregor in a completely new way. While he was the human salesman Gregor Samsa, he had never experienced Grete's playing in this profound way. Gregor has reclaimed his humanity only by becoming an insect. His metamorphosis, which removes him from the alienation of modern society by making his alienation literal, seems to also have finally led him to his humanity. The message seems to be that one can only become truly human through an impossible act of rebellion against socially acceptable human behavior.

The element of time reappears when Gregor recalls his plan to tell Grete that he had wanted to announce at Christmas that he would send her to the Conservatory. "Surely Christmas was long past?" he thinks. Gregor is no longer aware of the speed with which time passes, a direct contrast with his obsession with time in the first chapter. While there, he had been absorbed by the passing of every minute. Now he didn't even know the season.

Gregor's family, as usual, does not stop to consider the meaning of his emergence from his room, never imagining that Gregor has been truly touched by the music. Grete, for whom he had such tender feelings, overreacts far more than any of the others. This is the first time in the novel that she refers to Gregor as "it," refusing now to accept that idea that he is her brother. Grete insists that the "creature" certainly can't understand them, though they've never tried to find out. And she argues that if it were really Gregor, it would have left of his own accord out of consideration for the rest of them. She overlooks, of course, the fact that Gregor has had no way of leaving. She is certain that Gregor is persecuting them and wants to drive them out of the apartment so he can have it to himself, when in fact it is they who have kept him shut up in his room with furniture, garbage, and dirt.

Grete's impassioned speech is the climax of the novel. The conflict, at this point, comes to a close. The family at least realizes that Gregor, who has become the symbol of their alienation, is the problem and has to be gotten rid of. A reversal has taken place. Gregor, in undergoing is metamorphosis, cast aside his duty to his family in order to find his freedom. Now the family wants to cast aside their duty to him in order to find their own freedom.

Struck by the music of the violin and the recollection of his humanity that it brings on, Gregor suddenly remembers his duty once more. At the moment when his family has abandoned their duty to him, he realizes that he must once again sacrifice himself for their happiness. Gregor once again feels love and tenderness for his family. As a result, Gregor regains the element that has been missing from his freedom. His duty flares up, reminding him that his family's happiness is more

important to him than his freedom or even his life. Gregor dies by his own choice, realizing that his death is essential to his family's happiness. His concern with their happiness and his willingness to sacrifice himself is what makes him human despite his current physical form.

Ironically, Gregor's death is the result of his discovery of his identity. At the moment when love, freedom, and art are combined within him, he recognizes the need to finally leave his family to pursue their future. Gregor has here found his human identity, which he has been unable to find previously. The problem was that Gregor had no identity to start with. He was driven only by his sense of duty and then guilt, but since his guilt had no real cause, he also could not cling to it for his identity. Gregor manages to find his humanity only by rebelling against everything he was in the past.

Gregor dies at the precise moment when the sun comes up. He sees the first light of dawn and dies, echoing the beginning of the second chapter. There, Gregor entered a new phase of his existence when he awoke in twilight. A new phase had already started, of course, when he woke up to find himself transformed. In the second chapter, however, he had already made contact with his family, and was aware that their reaction was one of revulsion and that they had left him isolated. When Gregor awakens with the knowledge that his life has been completely changed, he finds himself in twilight; the moment when darkness is descending coincides with the moment when Gregor finds himself completely isolated. The moment of his death, on the other hand, coincides with the rising of the sun, the moment when darkness is driven back by light. That light is Gregor's love for his family and his discovery of his humanity. Having seen the first rays of this light through his window, Gregor dies without regrets.

The family is extremely thankful for Gregor's death. Yet they also mourn his passing. At their discovery of his death, the family discovers also the conflict in their feelings concerning the insect. They felt that he needed to disappear for the good of their family, yet at the same time they loved him as their son. The need for his death, based in economic motives, conflicts with their love, an essentially

human feeling. This humanity emerges at last when the family sits together and emerges at last looking as if they had been crying.

When Mr. Samsa insists that the lodgers leave, they quickly give up and depart. Once two of the lodgers saw that the third had already left, they "went scuttling after him as if afraid that Mr. Samsa might get into the hall before them and cut them off from their leader." They scuttle, like Gregor, and move quickly to avoid being cut off, like Gregor, because they have been humiliated and overpowered with authority. All humiliated human beings are seen as insects.

The family is now free of the specter of Gregor. His presence was a perpetual reminder of alienation. Without him, they are free to once again to continue living, believing that life is good and the future is bright. The family suddenly feels whole again. Gregor's father is able to reach inside himself for the courage to kick the lodgers out, and all three take the day off from work, something that would have been unthinkable for them at an earlier time. The wholeness of the family is symbolized by the Samsas' realization that their daughter has grown up. This recognition and the sudden thought that it is time for her to marry show that family life has been restored in its wholeness.

## Motifs

### Metamorphosis

The Metamorphosis depicts multiple transformations, with the most significant and obvious example being Gregor's metamorphosis into an insect. Though Gregor's physical change is complete when the story begins, he also undergoes a related change, a psychological transformation as he adapts to his new body. Grete experiences her own transformation in the story as she develops from a child into an adult. (In fact, in zoology the word metamorphosis refers to a stage in insect and amphibian development during which an immature form of the animal undergoes a physical transformation to become an adult.) At the beginning of the work, she is



essentially still a girl, but as she begins to take on adult duties, such as caring for Gregor and then getting a job to help support her family, she steadily matures. In the story's closing scene, her parents realize she has grown into a pretty young woman and think of finding her a husband. The scene signals that she is now an adult emotionally and also physically, as it describes the change her body has undergone and echoes Gregor's own physical change.

The family as a whole also undergoes a metamorphosis as well. Initially, the members of the Samsa family appear hopeless and static, owing to the difficulties resulting from Gregor's transformation as well as their financial predicament. But over time they are able to overcome their money problems, and when Gregor finally dies and the family no longer has to deal with his presence, all the family members are reinvigorated. As the story closes, they have completed an emotional transformation and their hope is revitalized.

### Sleep and Rest

References to sleep and rest, as well as the lack of sleep and rest, recur throughout *The Metamorphosis*. The story opens, for instance, with Gregor waking from sleep to discover his transformation, and Part 2 of the story begins with Gregor waking a second time, in this instance late in the day after the incident in which his father drove him back into his room. He quickly crawls under the sofa in his room to rest, and he spends a great deal of the story beneath the sofa either resting quietly or anxious and unable to rest. Moreover, Gregor describes how his father used to while away the day in bed or dozing in his armchair, and after the father resumes working, he often refuses to go to bed in the evenings and instead falls asleep in uniform in his chair. Toward the end of the work, as Gregor's health declines he stops sleeping almost entirely until finally he dies.

### Money

Because of the failure of the father's business and the debts that resulted, money is a chief concern for the Samsa family, and consequently it appears as a frequent topic in Gregor's thoughts and in the conversations of the family members.

Gregor's chief concern after discovering he's become an insect is that he'll lose his job, which we quickly learn he took solely as a means of earning money for his family. The office manager also implies while checking on Gregor that Gregor's boss suspects him of stealing money from the firm. Then, shortly after Gregor awakes at the beginning of Part 2, he overhears the father explaining the family's financial situation in detail to the mother and Grete. Later, the father and Grete both take jobs to make up for the loss of Gregor's income, and the family even takes in a few boarders as a means of bringing in extra money, which results in an argument about money after the boarders discover Gregor.

## Symbols

### The Picture of the Woman in Furs

Mentioned right at the outset of the story, the picture of the woman in furs serves as a symbol of Gregor's former humanity. Exactly why the picture, which shows a woman wearing a fur hat, a fur boa, and a thick fur muff that covers her arms, originally attracted Gregor is never made clear (though it could be that it embodied Gregor's desires—the presumably attractive woman may be sexually alluring while the furs she wears could signal wealth to Gregor). But Gregor's strong attachment to it does not derive from the content of the picture so much as from the fact that he put it on his wall when he was still human. He clings to it in panic when Grete and the mother are clearing out his room because, as he looks around the room in desperation, he sees it as one object from his former life that he can save. The content of the picture is irrelevant at that moment. It acts foremost as a reminder that a human lived there and chose that object to frame and display.

### The Father's Uniform

The uniform the father wears for his job symbolizes the father's dignity, as well as Gregor's shifting feelings of pity and respect for him. Throughout the story, we see the father primarily from Gregor's point of view. We learn about the failure of the father's business, for example, from Gregor's thoughts as he overhears the

father explaining the family's financial situation, and through Gregor we gain a picture of the father as a shiftless and depressed man whom Gregor appears to feel sorry for but not necessarily respect. But when Gregor runs out of his room in Part 2 and sees the father for the first time in weeks, Gregor's opinion of the father changes. This shift is most evident through Gregor's description of the father's uniform, which gives the father an air of dignity: Gregor notices the "smart blue uniform with gold buttons," and thinks the father looks to be "in fine shape," suggesting the father's self-respect has been restored, and with it Gregor's respect for him.

As the story continues, however, the father again declines—apparently from the pressure of living with Gregor—and in the evenings Gregor watches him sleep in his uniform, now dirty and covered with grease spots. As a result, the dignity the uniform conveyed to the father deteriorates, and Gregor again looks at him with pity. (Notably, there is also a picture in the house of Gregor in uniform. It is an army uniform, and in the picture Gregor smiles, "inviting one to respect his uniform and military bearing.")

## Food

Food represents the way the members of the Samsa family feel toward Gregor. Notably, it is Grete, the family member Gregor feels closest to, who feeds Gregor for most of the story. At the beginning of Part 2, she leaves milk and bread for him, showing sympathy and consideration for him after his transformation, particularly as milk was one of his favorite foods when he was human. When she sees he hasn't drunk the milk, she goes so far as to leave a tray of various foods out in order to discover what he now likes. Eventually, however, the work suggests that the family loses interest in feeding Gregor. One night, after the borders have moved in, the charwoman leaves his door open, and able to see everyone gathered, he watches as his mother feeds the borders. The scene causes Gregor to feel a great deal of resentment, and he thinks that he is starving while the borders stuff themselves, suggesting that as the members of the Samsa family have lost their sympathy for Gregor, they have stopped taking the same interest in feeding him.

Significantly, the father inflicts the injury in *Gregor's* back with an apple, and this wound appears to weaken *Gregor* and contribute to his death.

