

## *The Metamorphosis*

### I

As Gregor Samsa woke one morning from uneasy dreams, he found himself transformed into some kind of monstrous vermin.\* He lay on his hard, armour-like back, and if he lifted his head a little, he could see his curved brown abdomen, divided by arch-shaped ridges, and domed so high that the bedspread, on the brink of slipping off, could hardly stay put. His many legs, miserably thin in comparison with his size otherwise, flickered helplessly before his eyes.

‘What has happened to me?’ he thought. It was not a dream. His room, a proper, human being’s room, rather too small, lay peacefully between its four familiar walls. Above the table, on which his collection of textile samples was spread—Samsa was a commercial traveller—there hung the picture he had recently cut out from an illustrated magazine and mounted in a pretty gilded frame. It showed a lady\* posed sitting erect, attired in a fur hat and fur boa, and raising a heavy fur muff, which swallowed her arm right up to the elbow, towards the viewer.

Gregor’s gaze then turned towards the window, and the murky weather—one could hear the raindrops striking the window-sill—made him quite melancholy. ‘What if I went on sleeping for a while and forgot all these idiocies,’ he thought, but that was quite impossible, as he was used to sleeping on his right side and in his present state he was unable to get himself into this position. However energetically he flung himself onto his right side, whenever he did so he would rock onto his back again. He must have tried a hundred times, shutting his eyes so that he didn’t have to see his jittery legs, and he only gave over when he began to feel a slight ache in his side, something he had never felt before.

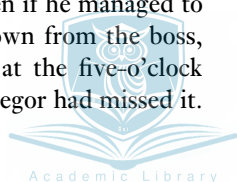
‘Oh Lord!’ he thought. ‘What a strenuous calling I’ve chosen! Day in, day out on the move. The stresses of making deals are far greater than they are in the actual business at home. And on top of that, I’m burdened with the misery of travelling; there’s the worry about train connections, the poor, irregular meals, human contact that is always changing, never lasting, never approaching warmth.



To hell with it all!’ He felt a slight itching high on his abdomen. He pushed himself slowly on his back towards the bedpost so that he could lift his head more easily; he found the itching spot, which was covered with lots of little white dots\* he had no idea how to interpret. He tried to probe the spot with one of his legs, but drew back at once, for the moment he touched it he was swept by cold shivers.

He slid back into his previous position. ‘Getting up so early’, he thought, makes you quite dull-witted. A man must have his sleep. Other travellers live like ladies of the harem. For instance, when I go back to the boarding-house to send off the orders I’ve booked, these gents are only just having their breakfast. I should try that on with my boss—I’d be sacked on the spot. In any case, who knows if that wouldn’t be good for me. If it wasn’t that I’ve held back on account of my parents, I’d have given in my notice long ago. I’d have gone to the boss and told him what I thought outright, with real feeling. It would make him fall off his desk.\* He’s got a peculiar way of perching on his desk and talking down to an employee from on high—who then, what’s more, has to come right up close to him on account of his deafness. Well, I haven’t entirely given up that hope; once I’ve got the money together to pay off my parents’ debt to him—that ought to take five or six years—I will do so, no two ways about it. Then the great break will be made. But for the present I have to get up, for my train leaves at five.’

And he looked across at his alarm-clock, which was ticking on the chest. ‘Father in heaven!’ he thought. It was half-past six, and the hands were moving steadily forwards. It was even later than half-past six; it was already approaching a quarter to seven. Was it that the alarm-clock hadn’t rung? From the bed it was clear to see that it had been properly set for four o’clock, so it had certainly rung. Yes, but was it possible to sleep peacefully on through this furniture-shattering alarm? Well, he hadn’t slept peacefully, though all the more deeply for that, it seemed. But what was he to do now? The next train went at seven; to catch that, he would have to hurry at a frantic speed, and his collection of samples wasn’t packed yet, and he certainly didn’t feel particularly fresh and lively himself. And even if he managed to catch the train, he couldn’t escape a dressing-down from the boss, for the attendant from work had been waiting at the five-o’clock train, and had long ago informed the boss that Gregor had missed it.



He was the boss's creature, stupid and spineless.\* What if Gregor were to tell them he was sick? But that would be extremely embarrassing and suspicious, for in all the five years he had been in employment Gregor hadn't once been ill until now. His boss would certainly arrive with the doctor from the Health Insurance, remonstrate with Gregor's parents for having a lazy son, and cut all their objections short by referring to the Insurance doctor, for whom, of course, there was only one kind of human being: healthy, but workshy. And anyway, in the present situation, would he be all that wrong? In fact, apart from feeling quite unnecessarily sleepy after such a long lie-in, Gregor felt perfectly well, and was even particularly hungry.

As he was thinking all this over very quickly without being able to decide to get up—the alarm was just ringing a quarter to seven—there was a cautious knock on the door at the head of his bed, and a call: 'Gregor!'—it was his mother—'it's a quarter to seven. Aren't you going to leave?' That gentle voice! Gregor was startled when he heard his own voice in reply; no doubt, it was unmistakably his previous voice, but merging into it as though from low down came an uncontrollable, painful squealing which allowed his words to remain articulate literally for only a moment, then stifled them so much as they died away that you couldn't tell if you'd heard them properly. Gregor had intended to answer fully and explain everything, but in his present circumstances he confined himself to saying, 'Yes, yes, thank you mother, I'm just getting up.' Because of the heavy wooden door, no doubt the change in Gregor's voice was not noticeable outside, for his mother was content with this explanation, and she shuffled away. However, this little conversation had made the other members of the family aware that Gregor, against expectation, was still at home, and his father was already knocking at one side door, faintly, but with his fist.\* 'Gregor, Gregor!' he called, 'what's up?' And after a little while, he admonished him again in a deeper voice: 'Gregor! Gregor!' From the door on the other side, though, his sister was wailing quietly: 'Gregor, are you feeling unwell? Do you need anything?' Gregor answered towards both sides: 'I'm finished.' And by taking the greatest care with his articulation and putting in long pauses between the separate words, he tried hard to rid his voice of anything that might strike them as out of the ordinary. His father even returned to his breakfast, but his sister whispered: 'Gregor,

open the door, I beg you.' But Gregor certainly had no intention of opening it; instead, he applauded the habit of caution he had adopted from his travels in locking all the doors at home overnight as well.

He wanted first to get up quietly without any disturbance, get dressed, and above all have his breakfast, and only then put his mind to what next, for, as he understood perfectly well, he wouldn't come to any sensible conclusion if he stayed in bed. He recalled that, perhaps through lying awkwardly, he had often felt some slight pain in bed, which, once he got up, turned out to be pure imagination. And he was curious to see how his present impressions would gradually fade away. He hadn't the slightest doubt that the change in his voice was nothing but the herald of a really bad cold, an occupational disease for travellers.

Throwing off the bedspread was quite simple; he needed only to puff himself up a little and it fell down of its own accord. But after that it got difficult, particularly because he was so uncommonly wide. He would have needed arms and hands to raise himself; but instead of those, he had only these many little legs, which were continually fluttering about, and which he could not control anyhow. If he tried to bend one of them, it was the first to stretch; and if he finally managed to get this leg to do what he wanted, all the others were flapping about meanwhile in the most intense and painful excitement, as if they had been let loose. 'Just don't stay uselessly in bed,' Gregor said to himself.

At first he tried to get out of bed with the lower part of his body, but this lower part, which in any case he hadn't yet seen, nor could have any proper idea of, proved to be too sluggish; it was such slow going; and when finally, driven nearly crazy, he heaved himself forward regardless with all his might, he found he had chosen the wrong direction and bumped violently against the bottom bedpost; and the burning pain he felt told him that it was the lower part of his body that was perhaps the most sensitive.

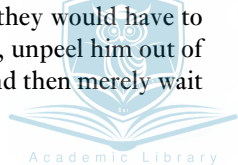
So he attempted to get his upper body out of the bed first, cautiously turning his head towards the edge. This worked easily enough, and in the end, despite its width and weight, the mass of his body slowly followed the way his head was turning. But when at last he held his head in the air outside the bed, he became afraid of moving any further forward in this way, for if he did finally let himself

drop, it would need a sheer miracle for his head to remain unharmed. And right now was no time to lose consciousness, not at any price; he would sooner stay in bed.

But, as he lay there as before, once again sighing heavily after repeating the effort and once again watching his little legs struggling among themselves, if anything worse than ever, and saw no possibility of bringing calm and order to this unruliness, once again he told himself he couldn't possibly stay in bed, and the most sensible thing was to sacrifice everything if there was just the slightest hope that this would release him from his bed. But at the same time he did not forget to remind himself between whiles that calm, the calmest, reflection was far better than desperate decisions. At such moments he turned his eyes as keenly as he could towards the window, but unfortunately the sight of the morning fog, which even shrouded the other side of the narrow street, had little confidence or cheer to offer. 'Seven o'clock already,' he said to himself as the alarm-clock began to ring again, 'seven o'clock already, and still so foggy.' And for a little while he lay quietly, his breathing shallow, as if he were expecting that perhaps the utter stillness would bring a return of the real, true, ordinary state of affairs.

But then he said to himself: 'Before it rings a quarter-past seven, I absolutely must have got out of bed, all of me. Besides, by that time somebody will have come from the business to ask after me, for it opens before seven o'clock.' And he set about rocking the entire length of his body out of bed all in one piece. If he fell out of bed in this way, his head, which he meant to lift sharply as he was falling, would as far as he could see remain unscathed. His back seemed hard; it would probably come to no harm as he fell on to the carpet. His greatest misgivings came from his concern over the loud crash which was bound to follow and would probably rouse if not terror then certainly apprehension on the far side of all the doors. Still, that would have to be risked.

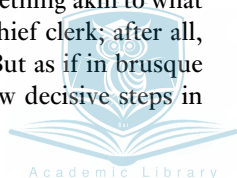
As Gregor was already rearing halfway out of bed—the new method was more play than effort, for he only needed to rock backwards—it occurred to him how simple it would all be if someone came to help him. Two strong people—he thought of his father and the maid—would have been entirely up to it; all they would have to do was put their arms under the dome of his back, unpeel him out of his bed in this way, stoop down with their load, and then merely wait



patiently with him until he had managed to swing over on the floor, when, he hoped, his legs would do what they were intended to do. Well now, quite apart from the fact that the doors were locked, should he really have called for help? In spite of his distress, he couldn't suppress a smile at the thought.

In rocking so strongly, he had already reached the point where he could scarcely keep his balance, and very soon he had to make up his mind once and for all, for in five minutes it would be a quarter-past seven—when there came a ring at the door of the apartment. 'That's somebody from the office,' he said to himself, and almost froze, while his little legs only danced all the faster. For a moment, everything was silent. 'They're not going to open it,' said Gregor to himself, seized by some sort of absurd hope. But then of course, as always, the maid walked with a firm tread to the door, and opened it. Gregor only needed to hear the first words of greeting from the visitor and he knew who it was—the chief clerk himself. Why was Gregor the only one condemned to serve in a firm where the slightest lapse provoked the greatest suspicion? Were all their staff rogues, the lot of them? Wasn't there one loyal, devoted person among them who, if he had merely neglected to make use of a few morning hours for business, went crazy with remorse and was literally incapable of leaving his bed?\* Wouldn't it really be enough to send an apprentice to enquire—if all this questioning was necessary in the first place? Did the chief clerk himself have to come, and did he have to show the entire, innocent family that the investigation of this suspicious matter could only be entrusted to the intelligence of the chief clerk? And more as a consequence of the agitation these reflections roused in Gregor than as the consequence of a proper decision, he swung himself with all his might out of the bed. There was a loud thump, but it was not a real crash. The fall was broken slightly by the carpet, and his back was more yielding than Gregor had thought. Hence the not-so-very-noticeable dull thud. Only he had not held his head in position carefully enough and had hit it; he turned it and rubbed it on the carpet in anger and pain.

'Something fell in there,' said the chief clerk in the room on the left. Gregor tried to imagine whether one day something akin to what had befallen him now could also happen to the chief clerk; after all, the possibility shouldn't actually be discounted. But as if in brusque answer to this question, the chief clerk took a few decisive steps in



the next room, making his patent-leather boots squeak. From the room on the right, his sister whispered to Gregor in explanation: 'Gregor, the chief clerk is here.' 'I know,' said Gregor to himself; but he did not risk raising his voice high enough for his sister to hear.

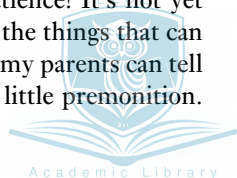
'Gregor,' his father said in turn from the room on the left, 'the chief clerk has come to find out why you didn't leave on the early train. We don't know what to tell him. Besides, he also wants to talk to you personally. So please open the door. He will be kind enough to excuse the disorder in your room.' 'Good morning, Herr Samsa,' the chief clerk broke in with a friendly tone. 'He isn't well,' Gregor's mother was saying to the chief clerk while his father was still speaking at the door. 'He's not well, believe me, sir. What other reason could there be for Gregor to miss a train! Indeed, the boy thinks of nothing but the business. I get almost angry that he never goes out of an evening; just lately he was in town for a week, but he was home every evening. There he sits at the table with us, reading the newspaper or studying the railway timetables. It's diversion enough for him to do his fretwork. For instance, he cut out a little picture-frame in the course of two or three evenings; you'll be amazed at how pretty it is; it's hanging in there in his room; you'll see it at once when Gregor opens the door. However, I'm very glad you are here, sir; we wouldn't have been able to persuade Gregor to open the door on our own; he's so stubborn; and he is definitely not well, although he denied it this morning.' 'I'll be right with you,' said Gregor slowly and deliberately, not moving so as not to lose a word of the conversation. 'I can't think of any other explanation, dear lady,' said the chief clerk, 'I hope it is nothing serious. Though on the other hand I have to say that often we businessmen—unfortunately or fortunately, as you will—simply have to overcome any slight indisposition, for the sake of doing business.' 'So can the chief clerk come into your room?' asked Gregor's father impatiently, knocking on the door again. 'No,' said Gregor. A painful silence fell in the room on the left. His sister began to sob in the room on the right.

Why didn't his sister join the others? She had probably only just got out of bed and hadn't dressed yet. And why was she crying? Because he wasn't getting up and wasn't letting the chief clerk in, because he was in danger of losing his job, and because then the boss would pursue their parents with his old demands again? Surely for the time being these were unnecessary worries. Gregor was still here

and didn't have the slightest thought of deserting his family. True, for the moment he was lying there on the carpet, and no one who knew the state he was in would seriously have expected him to let the chief clerk enter. Surely Gregor could not be dismissed on account of this small discourtesy, for which a suitable excuse could easily be found later. And it seemed to him that it would be much more sensible for them to leave him in peace instead of upsetting him with all these tears and appeals. But it was this very uncertainty that distressed the others and excused their behaviour.

'Herr Samsa,' the chief clerk now called with his voice raised. 'What's going on? You're barricading yourself in your room, answering merely with "yes" and "no", causing your parents severe, unnecessary worries and neglecting—this just by the by—your business obligations in a quite unheard-of way. I am speaking here in the name of your parents and your employer, and I beg you in all seriousness for a straight explanation right now. I'm amazed, amazed. I thought I knew you to be a quiet, sensible person, and now all of a sudden you seem to want to start showing off with these strange whims of yours. Indeed, the boss hinted this morning at a possible explanation for your absence—it concerned the job of cash-collecting recently entrusted to you—but truly, I almost pledged my word of honour that this explanation couldn't be the right one. But now that I see your incomprehensible obstinacy, I lose all wish to put in the least word for you, utterly. And your position is by no means the most secure. I had originally intended to tell you this between ourselves, but as you have me waste my time to no purpose, I do not see why your parents should not hear it as well. For your performance recently has been very unsatisfactory; true, it is not the season for doing particularly good business, we acknowledge that; but a season for doing no business at all, Herr Samsa, there is no such thing, and there cannot be.'

'But sir,' Gregor cried, beside himself, and forgetting everything else in his distress. 'I'll open the door at once, this very moment. A slight indisposition, an attack of giddiness, prevented me from getting up. I'm still lying in bed. But I'm quite fresh again now. I'm just getting out of bed! Just a little moment's patience! It's not yet going as well as I thought. But I'm fine now. Oh, the things that can come over a person! Yesterday evening I felt fine, my parents can tell you, or rather, yesterday evening I already had a little premonition.'

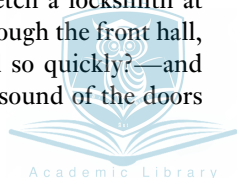




They must have noticed it. Why didn't I let you know in the firm! But one always thinks one can get over the illness without staying at home. Sir, sir, spare my parents! There is no cause for all the accusations you are making; no one has said a word about it to me. Perhaps you haven't yet read the last orders I sent in. In any case, I can still take the eight o'clock train and be off. The few hours' rest have given me strength. Don't let me hold you up, sir. I'll be at the office myself in no time, and please be so kind as to say that, and give my regards to our esteemed employer.'

And while Gregor was hurriedly pouring all this out, scarcely knowing what he was saying, he had drawn near the wardrobe with ease, probably as a result of the practice he had already had in bed, and he now tried to haul himself upright against it. He really did want to open the door, really did want to show himself and speak with the chief clerk; he was eager to learn what the others, who were asking for him now so much, would say at the sight of him. If they were terrified, then Gregor no longer bore the responsibility and could be at peace. But if they took it all calmly, then he too had no cause to get upset, and could, if he hurried, really be at the station at eight o'clock. At first he slid down a few times from the smooth wardrobe, but finally he gave himself one last swing and stood there upright; he no longer paid any attention to the pain in his lower abdomen, however sore it was. Now he let himself drop against the back of a chair close by and clung fast to the edges with his little legs. But in doing so he had also regained control of himself, and fell silent, for now he was able to hear the chief clerk.

'Could you understand a single word?' the chief clerk was asking his parents. 'He's not making a fool of us, is he?' 'For heaven's sake,' his mother cried, already in tears, 'perhaps he's seriously ill, and here we are, harassing him. Grete! Grete!' she screamed. 'Yes, Mother?' called his sister from the other side. They were communicating across Gregor's room. 'You must go to the doctor's this instant. Gregor is ill. Did you hear Gregor speaking just now?' 'That was an animal's voice,' said the chief clerk, noticeably quiet compared with the mother's screaming. 'Anna! Anna!' called his father through the hall into the kitchen, and clapped his hands. 'Fetch a locksmith at once!' And already the two girls were running through the front hall, their skirts rustling—how had his sister dressed so quickly?—and flinging open the apartment door. There was no sound of the doors



slamming; they had probably left them open, which tends to happen in dwellings where some great misfortune has occurred.

But Gregor had become much calmer. So it was true they could no longer understand his words, even though they had seemed clear enough to him, clearer than before, perhaps because his ear was adapting. But now at any rate they did believe there was something not quite right about him, and were ready to help him. The confidence and certainty with which the first arrangements had been made did him good. He felt drawn back into the sphere of humanity, and had high hopes of impressive and surprising achievements from both, from the doctor and from the locksmith, without really distinguishing very clearly between them. For his voice to be as intelligible as possible for the coming consultations, he cleared his throat a little, though he took care to muffle the noise, as it was possible that this too sounded different from human coughing, something he no longer trusted himself to decide. In the next room meanwhile, everything had fallen silent. Perhaps his parents were sitting at the table with the chief clerk, talking about him behind his back; perhaps they were all leaning against the door, listening.

Gregor pushed himself with the armchair slowly towards the door, let go of it there, flung himself at the door, clung to it upright—the pads on his little legs were slightly sticky—and for a moment rested there from the effort. Then he set about using his mouth to turn the key in the lock. Unfortunately, it seemed that he didn't have any proper teeth—what was he to grip the key with?—but to make up for that, his jaws were very strong, certainly, and with their aid he really did get the key moving, not caring that he was undoubtedly doing himself some sort of harm, for a brown liquid ran from his mouth, trickled over the key, and dripped on to the ground. 'Listen,' said the chief clerk in the next room, 'he's turning the key.' This encouraged Gregor greatly; but they should all of them have been calling to him, including his father and mother. 'Go on, Gregor,' they should have been calling, 'Keep at it! Go for the lock!' And, imagining that they were all following his labours with excitement, using all the strength he could muster and nearly fainting, he bit blindly into the key. As the key turned further round in the lock, he danced wildly round it too. He kept himself upright only by his mouth now, dangling from the key as necessary or pressing it down again with the entire weight of his body. The sharper sound of

the lock as it finally clicked back literally brought him to his senses. Heaving a sigh of relief, he said to himself: 'So I didn't need the locksmith after all,' and laid his head on the handle to open the door all the way.

As he'd had to unlock the door in this way, it was actually quite wide open by now, and he himself was still not to be seen. First he had to manoeuvre himself round the one half of the double-door, and very cautiously too, if he didn't want to fall plump onto his back just before he entered the room. He was still engaged in that difficult movement and hadn't time to attend to anything else, when he heard the chief clerk utter a loud 'Oh!'—it sounded like the wind whistling—and now he could see him as well, the nearest to the door, as he pressed his hand against his open mouth and retreated step by step, as if some invisible power were steadily at work, driving him away. Gregor's mother—her hair, despite the chief clerk's presence, still dishevelled from the night and right now standing on end—looked first with hands clasped together at his father, then took two steps towards Gregor and collapsed, surrounded by her outspread skirts, her face sunk and quite hidden in her breast. His father clenched his fist with a hostile expression, as if meaning to drive Gregor back into his room, but then he looked uncertainly round the living-room, covered his eyes with his hands, and wept so that his mighty breast shook.

Gregor made no attempt to enter the room now, but leaned against the other, firmly bolted, wing of the door on the inside, so that all there was to be seen of him was half his body and his head leaning towards one side as he peered across to the others. Meanwhile it had become much brighter; on the other side of the road a section of the endless grey-black building opposite—it was a hospital—was clearly to be seen, with its regular windows sharply interrupting the frontage; the rain was still falling, but only in large drops, each single one visible and each single one literally hurled onto the ground. The table was still laid with the china from breakfast, far too much of it, for Gregor's father regarded breakfast as the most important meal of the day, dragging it out for hours as he read various newspapers. Directly opposite, a photograph of Gregor from his time in the reserve\* hung on the wall, showing him as a lieutenant, with his hand on his sword, smiling light-heartedly, demanding respect for his stance and uniform. The door to the front hall was open, and, as the door to the

living-room was also open, it was possible to see out on to the apartment landing and the top of the downward stairs.

‘Well now,’ said Gregor, fully aware that he was the only one who had remained calm, ‘I shall get dressed straight away, pack my samples, and leave. Will you, will you let me leave? And you sir, well, you see I am not obstinate and I do my work willingly; the travelling is arduous, but without travelling I couldn’t live. Where are you going, sir? To the firm? You are? Will you report everything faithfully? A person may be momentarily incapable of working, but that is just the right time to recall his earlier achievements and consider that later, once the impediment has been removed, he will certainly work with all the more vigour and concentration. After all, I am so very much indebted to our esteemed employer, as you very well know. On the other hand, I have the care of my parents and sister. I’m in a cleft stick, but I will work my way out of it. But don’t make it more difficult for me than it is already. Speak on my behalf in the firm! Not much love is lost on the traveller there, I know. They think he earns a fortune and leads a great life at the same time. They just have no particular reason to think this preconception through. But you, sir, you have a better view of the situation than the other personnel—confidentially, a better view than our esteemed boss himself, who, in his capacity as entrepreneur, can easily be swayed in his judgement, to the disadvantage of his staff. And you know very well too how the traveller, who is away from the firm for almost the whole year, can so easily become the victim of gossip, chance events, and unfounded complaints, which are quite impossible for him to fend off, as he mostly doesn’t get to hear of them and it’s only by the time he has ended a trip exhausted, once he is at home, that he comes to feel in his flesh the serious consequences they entail, with causes that can no longer be clearly understood. Don’t go away, sir, without having said a word to me to show me that you think I am at least just a little bit right.’

But the chief clerk had already turned away at Gregor’s first words, and it was only over his twitching shoulder that he looked back at Gregor, his lips drawn back in a grimace. And while Gregor was speaking he did not stand still for a moment, but instead retreated towards the door without letting Gregor out of his sight—but very gradually, as if there were some mysterious prohibition against leaving the room. He was already in the outside hall, and from the sudden

movement he made as he drew his leg out of the living-room for the last time, one might have thought he had just burnt the sole of his foot. However, once in the hall he stretched his right hand as far out as he could towards the stairs, as if nothing less than deliverance\* from heaven awaited him there.

Gregor perceived that there was no way he could let the chief clerk leave in this mood, if his position in the firm was not to be in the utmost danger. His parents didn't really understand it all. In the course of the long years they had convinced themselves that Gregor was provided for in this business for life, and on top of that, they were now so caught up in their present worries that they had lost any view into the future. But Gregor had this view. The chief clerk must be detained, pacified, convinced, and finally won over; after all, Gregor's future, and his family's, depended on it! If only his sister were here! She was clever; she had been crying while Gregor was still lying peacefully on his back. And certainly the chief clerk, that lady's man, would have let her talk him round; she would have closed the living-room door and talked him out of his terror in the front hall. But his sister was just not there. Gregor himself had to act. And without thinking that as yet he was not in the least familiar with the movements he was capable of performing in his present state; without thinking too of the possibility, indeed probability, that once again his speech had not been understood, he abandoned the wing of the door; pushed himself through the opening, and made to approach the chief clerk, who was already clinging ludicrously with both hands to the banisters on the landing. But as he was looking for support, Gregor promptly fell down onto his many legs, giving a little cry. No sooner had this happened than he felt at ease with his body for the first time this morning; his little legs had firm ground beneath them; they obeyed perfectly, as he observed with pleasure; they even did their best to carry him where he wanted to go; he already believed that his final recovery from suffering was about to take place there and then. But the moment he lay on the ground not far from his mother, right opposite her, rocking with suppressed emotion, all at once, even though she had seemed so utterly lost within herself, she leapt up with arms outstretched and fingers outspread, and cried: 'Help! For God's sake, help!' She put her head to one side as if she wanted to see Gregor better, but then, contrariwise, ran back pointlessly, forgetting that the table was behind her, still laid. When she

reached it she sat down on it in haste, as though distraught, and did not seem to notice at all that the coffee was spilling in floods onto the carpet from the huge pot she had just upset.

‘Mother, mother,’ Gregor said softly, looking up at her. For a moment he had entirely forgotten the chief clerk; on the other hand, at the sight of the coffee pouring out he could not stop himself snapping his jaws several times into the empty air. At that his mother screamed once more, fled from the table, and fell into the arms of Gregor’s father as he came hurrying towards her. But Gregor had no time now for his parents; the chief clerk was already on the stairs, his chin on the banister, looking back for the last time. Gregor took a run-up, to be as sure as he could to catch up with him; the chief clerk must have sensed something, for he took a leap down several stairs and disappeared. But he was still crying ‘Aah!’, which echoed right up the entire stairwell. Unfortunately Gregor’s father, who until now had been relatively composed, appeared to be thrown into complete confusion by this flight of the chief clerk, for instead of running after the chief clerk himself, or at least not hindering Gregor in his pursuit, with his right hand he seized the chief clerk’s walking-stick, left behind by their visitor on an armchair as well as his hat and overcoat, and with his left he fetched a large newspaper from the table, and stamping his feet, set about driving Gregor back into his room by waving the stick and the paper. None of Gregor’s pleas helped, none of his pleas was understood; however submissively he turned his head, his father stamped all the more vigorously with his feet. Over on the other side of the room his mother had flung open a window despite the cold weather, and, leaning far outside, she pressed her face into her hands. A strong draught rose between street and stairwell, the curtains flew up at the windows, the newspapers rustled on the table, single sheets sailed over the floor. Implacably his father forced him back, hissing like a savage. As yet Gregor had had no practice at all in moving backwards, it was really very slow going. If he had only been allowed to turn around, he would have been in his room in no time, but he was afraid of making his father impatient if he tried this time-consuming manoeuvre, and every moment the stick in his father’s hand threatened him with a fatal blow on his back or his head. However, in the end Gregor had no alternative, for he noticed with horror that in going backwards he didn’t know how to keep in the right direction; and so, constantly looking sideways in

fear at his father, he began to turn around as quickly as possible, but still in reality only very slowly. Perhaps his father noticed his goodwill, for he didn't interrupt him in his efforts, but even guided his turning movements from a distance now and then with the tip of his stick. If only there weren't this intolerable hissing from his father! It made Gregor lose his head entirely. He had made an almost complete turn when he lost track, still heedful of the hissing, and briefly went into reverse. But when at last his head had managed to reach the doorway, it turned out that his body was too wide to get through the opening without more ado. Of course, in his father's present state of mind it didn't even remotely occur to him to do something like opening the other wing of the door, for instance, so as to create sufficient passage for Gregor. His fixed idea was merely that Gregor had to get into his room as quickly as possible. And he would never have permitted the elaborate preparations Gregor needed to pull himself upright and perhaps get through the door in that way. Rather, he drove Gregor on, as if there were no obstacles, making a particular commotion as he did so. Behind Gregor it no longer sounded like the voice of one single father merely; it was really no longer a joke by now, and Gregor forced himself—come what may—into the doorway. The one side of his body rose; he lay tilted in the opening; his one flank had been scraped raw, and there were nasty spots left on the white door. Soon he was stuck fast and would not have been able to move of his own accord; his legs on one side hung quivering up in the air, those on the other side were pressed painfully down on the floor—then his father gave him a vigorous kick from behind, which this time was truly a deliverance, and he flew, bleeding heavily, into the depths of his room. More, the door was slammed shut with the stick; and then at last all was still.

## II

It was not until dusk that Gregor woke from a sleep as heavy as if he had fainted. He wouldn't have woken much later, certainly, even if he hadn't been disturbed, for he felt he'd had a good night's rest and sleep; but even so, it seemed to him that he had been wakened by a fleeting footstep, and by the sound of the door to the front hall being opened cautiously. Here and there the light from the electric street-lamps lay pale upon the ceiling and the upper parts of the furniture,



but down below where Gregor lay all was in gloom. Slowly he pushed himself towards the door, still groping clumsily with his antennae, whose value he was only now learning to appreciate, in order to check what had happened there. His left side seemed to be one long scar, uncomfortably taut, and he literally had to limp on his two rows of legs. In any case, one little leg had been badly hurt in the course of the morning's events—it was almost a miracle that only one had been damaged—and it dragged lifelessly after him.

It was only when he reached the door that he noticed what had actually attracted him there: it was the smell of something to eat. For there stood a bowl of sweet milk, with little pieces of white bread floating in it. He might almost have laughed for joy, for he was even more hungry than he had been in the morning, and straight away he plunged his head into the milk almost over his eyes. But he soon drew it back again in disappointment; not only because eating caused him difficulties on account of his tender left side—and he was able to eat only if his entire body joined in, puffing and panting—but even more because he had no taste at all for the milk, which used to be his favourite drink and surely the reason why his sister had put it down for him; indeed, he turned away from the bowl almost in revulsion and crawled back to the middle of the room.

In the living-room the gas was lit, as Gregor could see through the crack in the door, but where it had once been his father's habit at this time of day to read in a loud voice to Gregor's mother and sometimes to his sister from his afternoon newspaper, now there was not a sound to be heard. Well, perhaps this custom of reading aloud, which his sister had always told him of and written to him about, had recently been abandoned. But round about too it was all so still, although the apartment was certainly not empty. 'What a quiet life the family leads anyway,' said Gregor to himself, and as he stared ahead into the dark he felt very proud that he had been able to provide his parents and his sister with such a life in such a fine apartment. But what if now all peace, all prosperity, all content, were to end in terror? So as not to lose himself in such thoughts, Gregor chose rather to get moving and began crawling up and down in his room.

Once only during the long evening one side door was opened, and once only the other was opened by a small crack and quickly closed again; someone probably felt the need to come in, but again had too



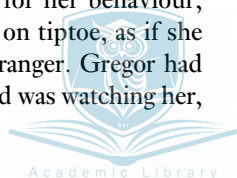


many misgivings. Gregor now came to a stop right by the living-room door, resolved all the same to bring the hesitant visitor in somehow, or at least find out who it was; but now the door was no longer being opened, and Gregor waited in vain. Early this morning, when the doors were locked, they all wanted to come in to him, but now, when he had opened the one door and the others had obviously been opened during the day, no one came any longer, and in addition the keys were now in the locks on the outside.

It was not until late at night that the light in the living-room was put out, so it was easy to conclude that parents and sister had been awake all the time, for, as he could clearly hear, they now departed, all three on tiptoe. It was certain now that no one would come in to Gregor until the morning, so he had a long time to reflect undisturbed on how he was to order his life anew. But the room, with its height and freedom, where he was forced to lie flat on the floor frightened him, though he could not think why, for after all, this was the room he had dwelt in for five years—so, making a half-unconscious turn and not without a slight feeling of embarrassment, he scuttled under the sofa, where, although his back was squashed slightly and he couldn't lift his head, he immediately felt comfortable and was only sorry that his body was too wide to be accommodated all the way underneath.

He remained there all night, which he passed partly dozing, starting up from hunger again and again, but partly with anxieties and vague hopes which all still led to the conclusion that for the time being he should keep calm, and by his patience and consideration make these inconveniences, which in his present state he was bound to cause his family, at least tolerable for them.

In the early hours of the morning—it was still almost night—Gregor soon had an opportunity to test the strength of the resolutions he had just made, for his sister, almost fully dressed, opened the door from the hall and looked nervously inside. She didn't find him at once, but when she noticed him under the sofa—Heavens, he must be somewhere, he couldn't have flown away!—she was so startled that, losing control of herself, she slammed the door shut again from the outside. However, as if she were sorry for her behaviour, she promptly opened the door again and entered on tiptoe, as if she were in the room of a serious invalid or even a stranger. Gregor had pushed his head out as far as the edge of the sofa, and was watching her,



wondering whether she would notice that he had left the milk, though certainly not because he wasn't hungry, and whether she might bring in some different food that suited him better. If she didn't do it of her own accord, he would rather starve than draw her attention to it, although actually he had a tremendous urge to dive out from under the sofa, throw himself at his sister's feet, and beg her for something good to eat. But his sister noticed at once with surprise that the bowl was still full, with just a little milk spilt around it; she picked it up straight away, not, indeed, with her bare hands, but using a rag, and carried it out. Gregor was extremely curious to see what she would bring instead, and he imagined all sorts of things. But he would never have guessed what his sister in her kindness really did. To try out his taste she brought him a large selection, all spread out on an old newspaper. There were some old, half-rotten vegetables, bones from yesterday's supper covered in a white sauce that had gone solid, a few raisins and almonds, some cheese which two days ago Gregor had declared was uneatable, one piece of dry bread, one piece of bread spread with butter, and one piece spread with butter and salt. As well as these she also put down the bowl, now probably intended once and for all for Gregor, which she had filled with water. And out of tact,\* for she knew Gregor would not eat in front of her, she left hastily and even turned the key, just so that Gregor might see that he could make himself as easy as he wanted. His little legs went whirring away as they bore him to his meal. His wounds too must be fully healed already; he no longer felt handicapped; he was astonished, and reflected how over a month ago he had cut his finger with a knife and only the day before yesterday this injury had still hurt him badly enough. 'Might I have become less sensitive?' he thought, already greedily sucking at the cheese, which had immediately, and insistently, attracted him ahead of all the other food on offer. With eyes weeping in gratification, he speedily devoured the cheese, the vegetables, and the sauce one after the other; on the other hand, he had no palate for the items of fresh food; he could not even stand the smell of them, and went as far as to drag the things he wanted to eat a bit further away. He had long been finished with them all, and was still lying lazily in the same place when his sister turned the key, slowly, as a sign that he should withdraw. That made him start up in fright immediately, although he had almost nodded off, and he hurried under the sofa once more. But it

cost him a great deal of will-power to stay under the sofa, if only for the short time his sister was in the room, for his abdomen had swollen slightly from so much to eat, and he could scarcely breathe there in the narrow space. Amid short spells of suffocation, his eyes protruding slightly, he watched how his unsuspecting sister used a broom to sweep up not only his leftovers, but even the food he had not touched at all, as if this too were no longer any use, and how she hastily shook it all into a bucket, which she closed with a wooden lid, afterwards carrying it all out. She had hardly turned her back before Gregor crawled out from under the sofa and puffed himself up.

This was how Gregor was given his food every day, once in the morning when parents and maid were still asleep, the second time after everyone's midday meal, for then the parents would also take a little nap, and his sister would send the maid away on some errand. Certainly, they didn't want Gregor to starve either, but perhaps they wouldn't have been able to bear finding out more about his food than they were told, or perhaps his sister wanted to spare them even what was possibly only a small grief, for they had really suffered enough. What excuses they had invented on that first morning to get the doctor and the locksmith out of the apartment was something Gregor could never find out, for, as he couldn't be understood, no one, not even his sister, even dreamt that he was able to understand others, and so, when his sister came into his room, he had to be content simply with hearing her sighs and cries to the saints\* now and then. Not until later, when she had grown used to everything just a little—of course, getting used to it entirely was out of the question—Gregor sometimes caught a remark that was kindly meant, or could be interpreted as such. 'He's enjoyed his meal today,' she would say, if Gregor had tucked into his food heartily, while in the opposite case, which gradually became all too frequent, she would say, almost sadly: 'Now he's left everything again.'

But while Gregor was not able to learn any news directly, he gathered quite a lot from listening at the rooms adjoining his, and whenever he heard voices he would run at once to the appropriate door and press the whole length of his body against it. In the early days especially, there was not a conversation that didn't refer to him in some way, if only obscurely. For two whole days, at every mealtime he heard nothing but discussions about what attitude they should take towards it all; but the same topic filled their conversation

between meals too, for there were always at least two members of the family at home, as it seemed nobody wanted to stay at home on their own, and there was no way they could leave the apartment all at the same time. Also, on the very first day the maid—it was not entirely clear what or how much she knew of what had happened—begged her mistress on her knees to allow her to leave at once, and when she made her farewells a quarter of an hour later, she thanked them with tears in her eyes for dismissing her, as if they had shown her the greatest of favours, and she swore a terrible oath, without even being asked, that she would never betray the least thing to anyone.

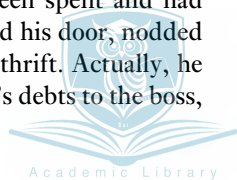
Gregor's sister, together with their mother, now had to do the cooking as well, though that did not make a great deal of work, for they ate almost nothing. Again and again Gregor would hear one of them encouraging the other in vain to eat, and always receiving the same reply: 'Thank you, I've had enough,' or something like it. Perhaps they drank nothing, either. Sister would often ask father whether he would like some beer, and lovingly offer to go and fetch it herself; then, when her father was silent, to allay his misgivings, she would say she could also send the caretaker out for it, but then at the last he would utter an emphatic 'No,' and nothing more was said about it.

In the course of the first day, the father explained their present financial situation and prospects to mother as well as daughter. Now and again he got up from the table and fetched some document or account-book from the small strongbox he had salvaged from the collapse of his business five years ago. Gregor could hear how he would unfasten the complicated lock and, after he had taken out what he had been looking for, lock it again. These explanations of his father's were in a way the first welcome news Gregor had heard since his imprisonment. He had supposed that his father had had nothing at all left from the business, at least his father had never told him anything to the contrary, and anyway Gregor hadn't asked him about it. Gregor's concern at the time had been only to do his utmost to have his family forget as quickly as possible the financial misfortune that had brought them to a state of utter hopelessness. And so he had begun to work with an especial passion, turning almost overnight from a little clerk into a commercial traveller, who naturally enjoyed very different opportunities to earn money, and any successful deal he made could promptly be transformed as a commission into hard

cash, which could be laid on the table at home to the astonishment and joy of the family. They had been good times, which never occurred again, at least not in such glory, even though later Gregor made so much money that he was in a position to take on the expenditure of the whole family—and did so. They just got used to it, the family as much as Gregor; they accepted the money gratefully, he provided it gladly, but there was no longer any particular warmth about it. Only his sister had remained close to him, and because, unlike Gregor, she was very fond of music and could play the violin most affectingly, it was his secret plan to send her to the conservatoire next year, regardless of the inevitable expense, which he would surely clear in some other way. During the short periods when he was able to stay in town, the conservatoire would often come up in conversation with her, but always as a beautiful dream impossible to realize, and their parents didn't even like hearing these innocent allusions to it. But Gregor had definite thoughts on the subject, and intended to make a solemn announcement about it on Christmas Eve.\*

Such were the thoughts, quite useless now in his present state, which would go through his head as he clung there erect, stuck to the door as he eavesdropped. Sometimes he was so tired all over that he was no longer able to listen in, and would vacantly let his head bump against the door, but then he would promptly hold it firm again, for even the little noise he caused had been heard in the next room and made them all fall silent. 'What's he up to now, I wonder,' said his father after a while, evidently turning towards the door, and only then their interrupted conversation would gradually be resumed.

Gregor now learned only too well—for his father was in the habit of repeating himself frequently as he explained, partly because for a long time he himself had not been engaged in these things, partly too because his mother didn't understand it all straight away at first hearing—that in spite of their misfortune, some financial assets, though not large, were still left from the old days, and had meanwhile been increased a little by the untouched interest. But apart from that, the money Gregor had brought home every month—he had kept only a small amount for himself—had not all been spent and had built up into a modest capital sum. Gregor, behind his door, nodded eagerly, pleased at this unexpected foresight and thrift. Actually, he would have been able to pay off more of his father's debts to the boss,



and the day when he might have been free of this position would have arrived far sooner, but now it was undoubtedly better the way his father had arranged things.

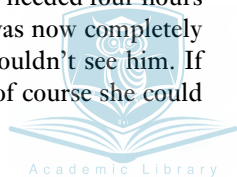
But this money was not at all sufficient for the family to live on the interest; it was sufficient perhaps to keep the family going for a year, or two years at most, but there wasn't more than that. So it was merely a sum that they shouldn't actually draw on and should put aside for emergencies; living expenses, however, they would have to earn. Now the father was an elderly man; true, he was fit, but he hadn't worked for five years and didn't think he might be capable of very much; during these five years, which were the first holiday he had had in his hard though unsuccessful life, he had put on a lot of weight, which had made him very slow and heavy. And as for Gregor's old mother, was she to go out perhaps and earn money, although she suffered from asthma, which made merely walking through the apartment effort enough for her, having to spend every other day on the sofa with the window open, breathing with difficulty? And was his sister supposed to earn money, and she just a child of seventeen, with a way of life up till then that he had been delighted for her to enjoy: dressing nicely, sleeping late, helping about the house, taking part in a few modest entertainments, and above all playing the violin? Whenever they began to discuss this need to earn money, Gregor would always first let go of the door and then hurl himself onto the cool sofa next to the door, for he burned with shame and sorrow.

He often lay there the whole night through, not sleeping for a moment, only scrabbling for hours on the leather. Or he would go to great lengths to push an armchair up to the window, then crawl up to the windowsill, and, jammed into the chair, he would lean against the window, evidently with some memory of the sense of deliverance he had once had from gazing out of the window. For in fact, things that were even quite near he saw more and more indistinctly from day to day. The hospital opposite, which he used to curse for the all-too-intrusive sight it offered, no longer came into view at all, and if he had not known specifically that the street he lived in was the quiet but completely urban Charlottenstrasse,\* he might have believed he was gazing from his window out into a desolation in which the grey sky and the grey earth were indistinguishably merged. His watchful sister only needed to see the armchair by the window twice, before,

once she had finished clearing up the room, she would always push the chair right back to the window again—indeed, from now on she even left the inside window casement open.

If only Gregor could talk with his sister and thank her for everything she had to do for him, he would have endured her help more easily; but as things were, he suffered under it. True, his sister tried as far as possible to dull the distress of it all, and the more time went by, naturally, the more she succeeded, but in time Gregor also came to understand everything much more clearly. Her mere entrance was dreadful for him. She would scarcely come in before she dashed straight to the window, without pausing to shut the doors, however careful she usually was to spare everyone the sight of Gregor's room, and she would fling it open in haste as if she were almost suffocating; she would also remain by the window for a while even on the coldest of days, taking in deep breaths of air. Twice a day she terrified him with all these alarums and excursions; he trembled all the while under the sofa, knowing full well that she would no doubt have been glad to spare him the commotion if it had only been possible for her to stay in the same room as Gregor with the window shut.

Once—perhaps a month had gone by after Gregor's transformation and his sister surely had no further cause in particular to be surprised at his appearance—she arrived a little earlier than usual, and came upon Gregor as he was gazing out of the window motionless, propped upright, enough to terrify her. Gregor wouldn't have been surprised if she hadn't come in, for his position prevented her from opening the window straight away, but she not only didn't enter, she even shrank back and closed the door; a stranger might really have thought that Gregor had been lying in wait for her and wanted to bite her. Of course, Gregor hid under the sofa at once, but he had to wait until midday before his sister returned, and she seemed much more uneasy than usual. He understood from this that the sight of him was still intolerable to her and was bound to remain intolerable for the future, and that she probably had to force herself not to run away from the sight of just the small part of his body that stuck out from under the sofa. To spare her even this sight, one day he carried the sheet onto the sofa on his back—he needed four hours to do it—and arranged it in such a way that he was now completely covered, and his sister, even if she bent down, couldn't see him. If she considered this sheet was unnecessary, then of course she could



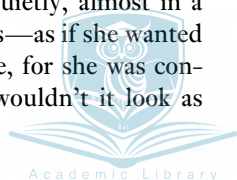
have removed it, for it was clear enough that there was no pleasure for Gregor in cutting himself off so completely; but she left the sheet as it was, and Gregor even believed he caught a grateful glance when on one occasion he cautiously lifted the sheet with his head to see how his sister was taking the new arrangement.

For the first two weeks the parents could not bring themselves to come in to him, and he often heard how greatly they appreciated the work his sister was now doing, whereas up to now they had frequently been annoyed at her, because she had appeared to them to be a rather useless girl. But now both of them, father and mother, would often wait outside Gregor's room while his sister cleared up inside, and she would scarcely have emerged before she had to tell them exactly what it was looking like in the room, what Gregor had eaten, how he had behaved this time, and whether perhaps some small improvement could be observed. Besides, his mother wanted to visit Gregor relatively soon, but father and sister restrained her at first with rational arguments, which Gregor listened to very attentively and approved of entirely. But later they had to hold her back by force, and when she cried out: 'Let me go to Gregor! He is my unhappy son, after all! Don't you understand, I must go to him?' Gregor then thought it would be a good thing if his mother did come in to him, not every day of course, but perhaps once a week; after all, she understood everything much better than his sister, who despite all her courage was only a child and had perhaps taken on such a heavy task only out of childish silliness.

Gregor's wish to see his mother was soon fulfilled. He didn't want to show himself at the window during the daytime, if only out of consideration for his parents; and he wasn't able to crawl all that much on the few square metres of the floor; during the night he found lying quietly hard to bear; soon eating no longer gave him the least pleasure, and so for diversion he developed the habit of crawling all over the walls and ceiling. He was particularly fond of hanging high up under the ceiling. This was something different from lying on the floor; one breathed more freely; an easy swinging motion passed through the body; and in this almost happy state of distraction up there, it could happen that to his own surprise he would let go and fall smack! to the ground. But now of course he had his body under control, quite unlike before, and didn't hurt himself even after such a great fall. His sister noticed at once the new amusement that



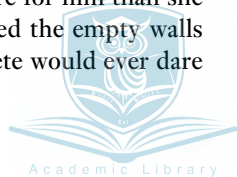
Gregor had found for himself—for when he was crawling he also left sticky traces here and there—so she got it into her head to make it easier for Gregor to crawl to a much greater extent by getting rid of the furniture that prevented it, which meant chiefly the wardrobe and the writing-desk. But she wasn't able to do this alone; she didn't dare ask her father for help; the housemaid would certainly not have helped her, for though this girl of about sixteen years old held out bravely with them since the first cook had been allowed to leave, she had begged the privilege of keeping the kitchen permanently locked and only having to open it when specially summoned. So his sister had no choice but, on an occasion when her father was not in the house, to fetch her mother. She arrived with cries of joy and agitation, but fell silent at the door outside Gregor's room. At first of course his sister looked in to see if everything in the room was in order; only then she let her mother enter. In the greatest of haste Gregor had pulled the linen sheet still lower, with more folds in it; it all really looked just like a sheet that happened to have been thrown over the sofa by chance. This time too Gregor refrained from spying from under the sheet; he gave up his claim to see his mother for now, and was only glad that she had come anyway. 'Do come; we can't see him,' said his sister, evidently leading her mother by the hand. Gregor could hear how the two frail women shifted the old wardrobe, pretty heavy for anyone, from its place, and how his sister took on the greatest part of the work without listening to the words of warning from her mother, who was afraid she would overstrain herself. It took a very long time. After a quarter of an hour's work, the mother said it would be better to leave the wardrobe where it was, for in the first place it was too heavy and they wouldn't have finished before the father arrived, and with the wardrobe in the middle of the room it would bar every path Gregor might take; and in the second place it wasn't at all certain anyway that it was doing Gregor a favour to remove the furniture. It seemed to her that the opposite was the case; it really weighed upon her heart to see the empty wall; and why shouldn't Gregor also have the same feeling, when he had been used to this furniture for so long and would feel abandoned in the empty room. 'And wouldn't it look,' she ended very quietly, almost in a whisper, not knowing Gregor's exact whereabouts—as if she wanted to spare him hearing even the sound of her voice, for she was convinced he didn't understand her words—'and wouldn't it look as



though by removing the furniture we had given up any hope of recovery and callously abandoned him to himself? I believe it would be best if we tried to keep the room as it was before, so that when Gregor comes back to us, he will find everything unchanged and be able to forget the interim more easily.'

As he listened to these words of his mother's, Gregor came to see that in the course of these two months, lack of any direct human attention, combined with the monotonous life within the family, must have confused his mind, for there was no other way he could explain how he could seriously have desired his room to be emptied. Had he really wanted them to transform his cosy room, comfortably fitted with old family furniture, into a lair where he would indeed be able to crawl undisturbed in all directions, but at the same time he would be rapidly consigning his human past to utter oblivion? Wasn't he even now already close to forgetting, and only his mother's voice, unheard for so long, had shaken him out of it. Nothing was to be removed. Everything should stay. He could not do without the positive effects the furniture had on his condition. And if the furniture prevented him from carrying on this senseless crawling round, then that did no harm, it was rather a great benefit.

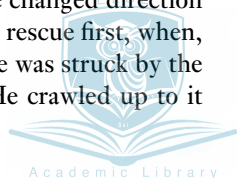
But unfortunately his sister took a different view. When discussing anything that concerned Gregor she had become accustomed, and not unjustifiably, to taking on the role of special expert towards her parents, and so on this occasion too her mother's advice was sufficient reason for her to insist not just on removing the wardrobe and the writing-desk, which were the only things she had thought to move at first, but also on removing all the furniture entirely, excepting the indispensable sofa. Naturally it was not only childish defiance that set her on this course, nor the unexpected and hard-won self-confidence she had achieved of late; she had, after all, actually observed that Gregor needed a great deal of space to crawl in, while on the other hand, as far as one could see, he hadn't the slightest use for the furniture. But perhaps some part was also played by the wayward fancy of girls of her age, which looks for any opportunity to indulge itself and now tempted Grete to exaggerate Gregor's terrifying situation still further, in order to do even more for him than she had up until now. For a room where Gregor ruled the empty walls alone was surely a space which no one except Grete would ever dare to enter.



And so she refused to let her mother dissuade her from her decision; from sheer agitation her mother seemed insecure in this room; she soon fell silent and helped Gregor's sister, as far as she was able, to move the wardrobe outside. Now, Gregor could if necessary manage without the wardrobe, but the writing-desk at least had to stay. And the women had hardly left the room with the wardrobe, groaning as they clung to it, when Gregor thrust his head out from under the sofa to see how he might intervene, cautiously and as considerately as possible. But unfortunately it had to be his mother who came back first, while in the next room Grete had her arms round the wardrobe, rocking it to and fro by herself, without of course being able to budge it. But his mother was not used to the sight of Gregor; it might make her ill, so Gregor rushed backwards in terror to the other end of the sofa, but he couldn't prevent the linen sheet from stirring a little at the front. That was enough to attract his mother's attention. She stopped, stood still for a moment, and then went back to Grete.

Although Gregor had to tell himself over and over again that nothing extraordinary was happening, only a few pieces of furniture being rearranged, still, this toing and froing of the women, their little calls to each other, the furniture scraping on the floor, affected him like some vast tumult fed from all sides, and however tightly he tucked in his head and legs and pressed his body close to the ground, he was forced to tell himself that he wouldn't be able to stand it all for long, no argument about it. They were clearing out his room; they were depriving him of everything that was dear to him, they had already carried out the wardrobe, which held his fretsaw and his other tools; they were now tugging at the writing-desk, fast embedded in the floor, where he had written his homework as a student at business school, as a secondary schoolboy, indeed, even as a pupil at elementary school—enough! He really had no more time to examine the good intentions of the two women, whose existence, incidentally, he had almost forgotten, for they were now working in silence, exhausted, and only their heavy, lumbering steps were to be heard.

And so he broke out—the women were just leaning against the bureau in the next room to catch their breath. He changed direction four times as he ran; he really had no idea what to rescue first, when, hanging on the wall, which was otherwise bare, he was struck by the picture of the lady dressed in nothing but fur. He crawled up to it



hurriedly and pressed himself against the glass, which held him fast and did his burning stomach good. This picture at least, which Gregor now covered completely, no one would take away from him—that was certain. He turned his head towards the door of the living-room to watch the women as they came back.

They hadn't given themselves much of a rest and were already returning. Grete had put her arm round her mother, almost carrying her. 'Well, what shall we take now?' said Grete, looking round. Then her eye caught Gregor's, on the wall. No doubt it was only because of her mother's presence that she kept her composure, bent her face to her mother to prevent her from looking round, and said, though trembling and without thinking: 'Come, let's go back into the living-room for a moment, shall we?' Grete's intention was clear to Gregor: she wanted to bring her mother to safety and then drive him down from the wall. Well, she could always give it a try! He was sitting on his picture and he wasn't giving it up. He would rather make a leap for Grete's face.

But Grete's words really did perturb their mother; she moved aside, caught sight of the monstrous brown patch on the flowered wallpaper, and before it actually dawned on her that what she was looking at was Gregor, she gave a hoarse scream and cried: 'Oh, my God! Oh, my God!' and fell across the sofa with arms outspread as though she were just giving up, motionless. 'Gregor!' his sister called, raising her fist with a compelling look. These were the first words she had spoken to him directly since his transformation. She ran into the next room to fetch some smelling-salts to rouse her mother from her faint. Gregor wanted to help too—there was still time to rescue the picture—but he was sticking fast to the glass and had to use force to tear himself off; then he too ran into the next room, as if he could give his sister some kind of advice, as he used to do in the past; but he could only stand behind her, doing nothing; while she was hunting among various little flasks, she was startled the moment she turned round; one bottle fell to the ground and broke in pieces; a splinter hurt Gregor in the face; some sort of medicine spilled around him, smarting; without waiting any longer, Grete took as many little flasks as she could hold, and ran with them to her mother; she slammed the door shut with her foot. Gregor was now cut off from his mother; perhaps through his fault she was close to death; he oughtn't to open the door, not unless he wanted to drive

his sister away, and she had to stay with their mother; all he could do was wait, and, weighed down by self-reproach and anxiety, he started to crawl. He crawled over everything, walls, furniture, ceiling, and finally, as the entire room began to whirl around him, in his desperation he fell down onto the big table, right in the middle.

A little while passed; Gregor lay there limp; round about all was quiet; perhaps that was a good sign. Then came a ring. The maid was of course locked in her kitchen, so Grete had to go and open the front door. Father had arrived. 'What's happened?' were his first words; no doubt Grete's appearance had revealed all. Grete replied in a stifled voice; evidently she was pressing her face to her father's breast: 'Mother fainted, but she's better now. Gregor has broken out.' 'I always expected he would,' her father said, 'I've always said so, but you women didn't want to listen.' It was clear to Gregor that his father had wrongly interpreted Grete's all-too-brief report, and assumed that he was guilty of some violent act. So Gregor now had to try to pacify his father, for he had neither the time nor the ability to explain to him. And so he fled to the door of his room and pressed himself against it, so that when his father came in from the front hall he could see straight away that Gregor had every intention of going back into his room at once, and that it wasn't necessary to drive him back, rather, that they only needed to open the door and he would promptly vanish.

But his father was in no mood to notice such delicacy. 'Aha!' he cried as soon as he came in, in a tone that suggested he was full of rage and elation at the same time. Gregor pulled his head back from the door and raised it towards his father. He had really never imagined his father as he was standing there now, though recently, absorbed in this new skill of crawling around, he had no longer been concerned about what was going on in the rest of the apartment, as he once had been, and he should really have been prepared to encounter changed conditions. Nevertheless, nevertheless, was this still his father? The same man who lay buried deep in his bed when Gregor had set off on a business trip in earlier times; who had greeted him from his armchair, still wearing his dressing-gown, on the evenings when he returned; who wasn't really capable of getting to his feet, but had only raised his arms to signal he was glad to see him; the same man, when they had taken a rare stroll together on a few Sundays in the year and on high holidays, father between Gregor and mother, already slow enough themselves, who always walked a

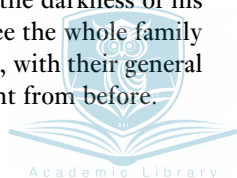
bit more slowly still, wrapped in his old overcoat, working his way forward, all the time cautiously planting his crutch, and who, when he wanted to say something, almost always stopped still and gathered his entourage around him? But now he stood firm and erect; dressed in a tight blue uniform\* with gold buttons, of the sort worn by the servants of a bank; his powerful double chin unrolled above the stiff high collar of his coat; his black eyes looked out clear and sharp from beneath his bushy eyebrows; his white hair, once dishevelled, was combed down in a shining, meticulously straight parting. He threw his cap with its gold monogram, probably a bank's, in a curve right across the whole room onto the sofa, and walked, the tails of his long uniform coat pushed back, his hands in his pockets, his face grim, towards Gregor. He probably didn't know what he had in mind himself; in any case, he lifted his feet unusually high, and Gregor was amazed at the gigantic size of his boot-soles. But he didn't linger in his amazement; he knew from the very first day of his new life that in his father's eyes only the greatest severity was the right way to deal with him. And so he ran ahead of his father, stopped when his father came to a halt, and hurried forward again if his father only stirred. They went round the room several times like this without anything decisive happening, indeed, without appearing to be a pursuit, it was so slow. That is also why Gregor stayed on the floor for the present, especially as he was afraid his father might take his flight on to the walls or ceiling as an act of particular wickedness. In any case, Gregor had to tell himself that he wouldn't be able to keep up even this way of running, for where his father took one step, he had to perform countless movements. Breathlessness was already becoming noticeable, just as in the past he had possessed lungs that were also not entirely reliable. As he staggered along in this way, trying to gather all his strength together for the race, he scarcely kept his eyes open; with his mind so dulled he didn't think of any other deliverance at all than by running, and he had almost forgotten that the walls were open to him, though here they were obstructed by carefully fretted furniture, carved jagged and sharp—when something tossed lightly flew down and landed right next to him, and then rolled in front of him. It was an apple; at once a second flew after it; Gregor stood still in terror—running any further was useless, for his father had decided to bombard him. He had filled his pockets from the fruit-bowl on the sideboard and, without aiming very exactly for

the moment, threw apple after apple. These little red apples rolled about on the ground as if they were electrified, bouncing off one another. One badly thrown apple skimmed Gregor's back, but slid off without harming him. On the other hand, the one that flew straight after it literally penetrated Gregor's back; Gregor tried to drag himself on further, as if the surprising, unbelievable pain would pass with a change of place; but he felt as if he were nailed fast,\* and collapsed in a total confusion of all his senses. Only with his last glance he was still able to see how the door to his room was flung open and his mother rushed forward, his sister ahead of her screaming, his mother in her shift, for his sister had undressed her so that she could breathe more easily during her faint; he could see how his mother ran to their father, how on the way her layered skirts slipped to the ground one after another, and how she stumbled over the skirts to urge herself upon their father, embracing him, in total union with him—Gregor's sight was already failing—and with her hands circling the back of his father's head she begged him to spare Gregor's life.

## III

Gregor's wound was serious and gave him pain for over a month—the apple remained, since no one dared remove it, as a visible memorial in his flesh\*—but it seemed to have reminded even his father that, despite his present sad and repulsive form, Gregor was a member of the family who was not to be treated as an enemy; instead, family duty towards him commanded that they should swallow their disgust, and put up with him in patience, just put up with him.

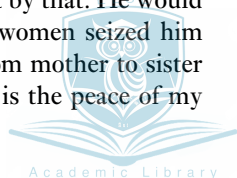
And even though it seemed his wound had made Gregor lose his mobility for ever, and though for the present, like some disabled veteran, he needed long, long minutes to cross his room—crawling aloft on the ceiling was out of the question—he drew some recompense for this deterioration in his condition, one he considered was entirely adequate: towards evening the door to the living-room, which he grew used to watching keenly for as much as two hours beforehand, was always opened, so that, lying in the darkness of his room, invisible from the living-room, he might see the whole family at the lamp-lit table and hear what they had to say, with their general permission as it were, a very different arrangement from before.



Certainly, there were no longer the lively conversations of the past, which Gregor had always thought about with some longing in his tiny hotel rooms when he was obliged to throw himself wearily into damp bedclothes. Now things were very quiet in the main. Soon after supper the father would fall asleep in his armchair; mother and sister would remind each other to be quiet; bending far forward over the lamp, the mother would sew fine lingerie for a fashion shop; the sister, who had taken a job as a sales assistant, was learning shorthand and French in the evening so that she could perhaps get a better position later on. Sometimes the father would wake up and say to the mother, as if he wasn't aware he had been sleeping: 'What a long time you've been sewing again!' and would go back to sleep at once, while mother and sister would smile at each other wearily.

With a kind of obstinacy, the father refused to take off his uniform, even at home; and while his dressing-gown hung uselessly on its hook, he would slumber fully dressed in his proper place, as if he were always ready for duty and waiting here too for the voice of his superior. Consequently his uniform, which hadn't been new in the first place, began to look less clean and tidy, despite the care mother and daughter gave it, and Gregor would often gaze for entire evenings at this coat with its many, many stains and its gold buttons radiant from constant polishing, which the old man wore as he slept—in discomfort but at peace.

As soon as the clock struck ten, the mother would try to wake the father, talking to him gently, and then try to persuade him to go to bed, for this wasn't sleeping properly, was it?—and he needed his sleep, for he had to start work at six. But, with the obstinacy that had come over him when he became a bank attendant, he always insisted on staying at the table longer, even though he regularly fell asleep and it was only with the greatest of trouble that he could be induced to exchange his armchair for his bed. Then, however much mother and sister would urge him, cajoling gently, he would shake his head slowly for a quarter of an hour at a time, keep his eyes closed, and stay where he was. The mother would tug at his sleeve, whisper sweet words into his ear, the sister would leave her homework to help her mother, but her father wasn't to be caught out by that. He would just sink lower in his armchair. Only when the women seized him under the arms, he would open his eyes, look from mother to sister in turn, and habitually say: 'What a life! So this is the peace of my





old age.' And supported by the two women, he would heave himself up, making heavy weather of it, as if he were the greatest of burdens to himself, allow himself to be led by the women as far as the door, dismiss them there with a gesture, and continue on his own, while the mother would hastily fling down her sewing things and the sister her pen to run after him and help him some more.

Who, in this worn-out and overtired family, had time to care for Gregor more than was necessary? The household had to economize more and more. The maid was dismissed in the end; a huge, bony charwoman with a head of flying white hair came morning and evening to do the heaviest work; the mother took care of everything else, as well as all her sewing. Things even went so far that various pieces of family jewellery, which mother and sister used to wear with great delight for entertainments and celebrations, were sold, as Gregor gathered in the evening from the general discussion of the prices they had fetched. But the biggest complaint was constantly that they were unable to give up the apartment, which was far too big for their present situation, as they could not work out how they were to move Gregor. But Gregor could see that it wasn't just consideration for him that prevented them from moving house, for they could easily have transported him in a suitable box with a few holes in it for air; what chiefly held the family back from changing address was far more their utter hopelessness, and the thought that they were stricken with a misfortune like no one else in their entire circle of friends and relations. What the world requires of the poor they fulfilled to their limits; the father fetched breakfast for minor bank clerks, the mother sacrificed herself for the lingerie of strangers, the sister ran to and fro behind the counter at the customers' behest, but further than that the family's powers did not stretch. And the wound in Gregor's back began to hurt again as if it were fresh, when the mother and sister, after taking the father to bed, would return and, putting their work aside, would sit cheek to cheek; and when his mother, pointing to Gregor's room, would say: 'Do close the door, Grete'; and when Gregor was once more in darkness, while in the next room the women would weep together or stare dry-eyed at the table.

The nights and the days Gregor spent almost entirely without sleep. Sometimes he dwelt on the thought that when the door was next opened he might take the family's affairs fully in hand again, as

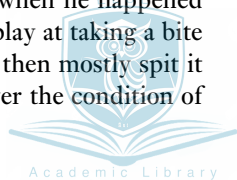


he had before; figures reappeared in his thoughts after long absence: the boss, the chief clerk, the lesser clerks and the apprentices; the porter who was so stupid; two or three friends from other firms; a chambermaid in a hotel in the provinces, a sweet, fleeting memory; a girl, cashier in a millinery shop, he had been seriously courting, but too slowly—they all appeared mixed in with strangers or people already forgotten, and he was glad when they vanished. But afterwards he was not at all in the mood to worry about his family; he was simply full of rage at how badly they looked after him. And though he couldn't imagine anything he might enjoy eating, he still made plans about getting into the larder, even if he wasn't hungry, to take what was his rightful due anyway. Now, no longer giving any thought to what she might do for Gregor that would give him particular pleasure, morning and noon before she dashed off to the shop, his sister would hurriedly push any old food into Gregor's room with her foot, and then in the evening sweep it up with a whisk of her broom, indifferent to whether he had merely tasted it or—which was mostly the case—left it untouched. Clearing out his room, which she always did in the evening now, couldn't be done quickly enough. The walls were stained with trails of grime, and tangles of dust and filth lay here and there. In the early days, when his sister arrived Gregor would station himself in corners where such dirt was particularly noticeable, taking this position to some extent as a reproach to her. But he could well have stayed there for weeks without her mending her ways; she saw the dirt every bit as clearly as he did, but she had just decided to leave it. On the other hand, she watched with a touchiness that was quite new in her, and which, indeed, had seized the whole family, to make sure that the task of clearing up Gregor's room remained in her hands. His mother had once given his room a thorough clean-out, and only managed it after several buckets of water—in any case, all that damp hurt Gregor's feelings too, as he lay wide, embittered, and immobile on the sofa. But his mother did not escape punishment, for that evening his sister had barely noticed the change in Gregor's room before she rushed into the living-room, highly affronted, and despite her mother's hands uplifted in entreaty, broke into convulsive sobbing, while her parents—the father of course was startled out of his armchair—gazed at her, amazed and helpless at first, until they too began to stir; to his right the father scolded the mother for not leaving it to the sister to clean Gregor's

room; to his left on the other hand he yelled at the sister that she would never be allowed to clean Gregor's room again; while the mother tried to drag the father, who was beside himself with rage, into the bedroom, the sister, shaking with sobs, hammered on the table with her little fists; and Gregor hissed aloud with fury that it didn't occur to anyone to shut the door and spare him this sight and this commotion.

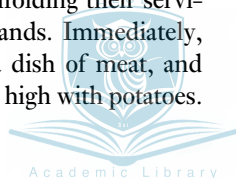
But even if his sister, exhausted from her job, had had enough of looking after Gregor as she had once done, his mother certainly would not have to take her place, and Gregor still wouldn't need to be neglected. For now the cleaning-woman was there. This old widow, whose powerful frame must have helped her to survive the worst in her long life, had no real feelings of revulsion towards Gregor. Without being in any way curious, she had once chanced to open the door to his room and immediately stopped short in amazement, her hands folded on her stomach, at the sight of Gregor, who was taken by complete surprise and, although no one was chasing him, began to run to and fro.\* Since then she never failed to open the door a little for just a moment every morning and evening to look in on Gregor. To begin with she even called him up to her with words that she evidently regarded as friendly, such as: 'Come on, you old dung-beetle!' or 'Well, look at the old dung-beetle then!' Gregor didn't answer to such modes of address, but stayed where he was, as if the door hadn't opened at all. Instead of letting this charwoman disturb him pointlessly as the fancy took her, if only they had told her to clean his room every day! Once, early in the morning—heavy rain, already perhaps a sign of the coming Spring, was beating against the window-panes—Gregor was so incensed when the charwoman started using her pet names again that he turned on her, however slowly and feebly, as if to attack her. But instead of being afraid, the charwoman merely lifted a chair that happened to be near the door, and as she stood there, with mouth gaping, her intention was clear: she would only close her mouth when the chair in her hand crashed down on Gregor's back. 'Well, aren't you going to have another go, then?' she asked, when Gregor turned around again, and calmly put the chair back into the corner.

Gregor was now eating almost nothing. Only when he happened to pass by the food put ready for him, he would play at taking a bite of it into his mouth, keep it there for hours, and then mostly spit it out again. At first he thought it was mourning over the condition of



his room that kept him from eating, but he very soon became reconciled to the changes in his room. The family had become used to putting things they couldn't accommodate anywhere else into this room, and there were now a great many such things, as they had let one room in the apartment to three gentleman-lodgers. These grave gentlemen—all three wore full beards, as Gregor discovered once as he peered through a crack in the door—were scrupulously concerned about order, not only in their own room, but, now that they had moved in as lodgers, in the entire household, which meant particularly in the kitchen. They wouldn't put up with useless, let alone dirty, junk. Besides, they had mainly brought their own furniture with them. For this reason many things that were admittedly not saleable, but which the family still didn't want to throw away, had become superfluous. All these made their way into Gregor's room. Likewise too the ash-can and the rubbish-bin from the kitchen. Whatever she had no use for at the moment the charwoman, who was always in a hurry, simply slung into Gregor's room; fortunately Gregor mostly saw only the object in question and the hand that was holding it. Perhaps the charwoman intended to take the things back when time and opportunity offered, or throw them out together all at one go, but in fact they just stayed where they had landed when she first threw them, unless Gregor wriggled through the lumber and shifted it around, at first forced to do so, because otherwise there was no room for him to crawl, but later with increasing pleasure, although after such excursions he would once again remain motionless for hours, sad and tired to death.

As the lodgers sometimes also took their evening meal in the shared living-room, there were many evenings when the living-room door remained closed, but Gregor found it quite easy to get by without having it opened; after all, he hadn't taken advantage of a number of evenings when it had been opened, but instead, unnoticed by the family, he had lain in the darkest corner of his room. However, the charwoman had once left the door to the living-room ajar, and it remained like that, even when the gentleman-lodgers came in that evening and the lamp was lit. They sat on high at the table where in the past father, mother, and Gregor used to sit, unfolding their serviettes and taking their knives and forks in their hands. Immediately, Gregor's mother appeared in the doorway with a dish of meat, and close behind her came the sister holding a dish piled high with potatoes.



Dense steam rose from the food. The gentleman-lodgers bent over the dishes placed before them as if they wanted to test them before eating, and in fact the one sitting in the middle, seemingly regarded by the others as the authority, cut up one piece of meat while it was still in the dish, evidently to ascertain whether it was tender enough or whether it shouldn't possibly be sent back to the kitchen. He was satisfied, and mother and sister, who had been watching nervously, sighed with relief and began to smile.

The family itself ate in the kitchen. Nevertheless, before the father went into the kitchen, he would enter the living-room and, making a single bow, his cap in his hand, do a round of the table. The gentlemen all rose together, murmuring something into their beards. Then, when they were alone, they ate in almost total silence. It seemed strange to Gregor that out of all the various sounds of eating they made, over and over again he could make out the champing of their teeth, as if he had to be shown that one needs teeth to eat, and that even with the finest jaws, if they were toothless, nothing could be achieved. 'I do have an appetite,' said Gregor sorrowfully to himself, 'but not for these things. How these gentlemen feed themselves, and I perish.'

On the very same evening—Gregor couldn't remember having heard it all this time—the violin sounded from the kitchen. The gentlemen had already finished their supper; the one in the middle had taken out a newspaper, given a page to each of the other two, and now they leaned back, reading and smoking. When the violin started to play, they began to take notice, rose, and tiptoed to the hall door, where they remained, standing crammed together. The family must have heard them from the kitchen, for the father called: 'Perhaps the gentlemen are displeased by the playing? It can be stopped at once.' 'On the contrary,' said the middle gentleman, 'wouldn't the young lady like to come in to us and play here in the living-room where it is much more comfortable and friendly?' 'By all means,' called the father, as if it was he who was playing. The gentlemen went back into the room and waited. Soon, in came father with the music-stand, mother with the music, and sister with the violin. Calmly the sister put everything ready for playing: the parents, who had never rented out rooms before and so overdid the politeness towards the lodgers, did not venture to sit in their own armchairs; the father leaned against the door, his right hand hidden between two buttons on the

tightly fastened coat of his livery; the mother, on the other hand, accepted the armchair offered by one of the gentlemen and, letting it stay on the spot where he had happened to leave it, sat in a corner, out of the way.

Gregor's sister began to play; father and mother followed the movements of her hands attentively from either side. Attracted by the playing, Gregor had ventured a little further out until his head was already in the living-room. He was hardly surprised that he had shown so little consideration for the others of late; in the past this consideration had been his pride. And besides, right now he would have had even greater reason to hide, for, because of the dust on everything in his room, which rose at the slightest movement, he too was quite covered in it; he dragged threads, hairs, bits of left-over food about on his back; his indifference towards it all was far too great for him to do what he had previously done several times a day, lie on his back and scrub it against the carpet. And in spite of this condition, he did not hesitate to advance some way forward on the spotless floor of the living-room.

In any case, no one took any notice of him. The family was wholly taken up by the playing; the gentlemen on the other hand had at first positioned themselves, hands in pockets, much too close behind the sister's music-stand, which was surely bound to disturb her; they soon withdrew, conversing in low voices with heads lowered, back to the window, where, under the father's anxious eye, they remained. It really seemed more than obvious that they were disappointed in their assumption that they were to hear some beautiful or entertaining violin-playing, had had enough of the entire performance, and were only consenting to this interruption to their quiet out of politeness. The way they all blew out their cigar-smoke from nose and mouth in particular suggested great irritability. And yet his sister was playing so beautifully. Her face was inclined to one side; her eyes followed the lines of the music closely and sadly. Gregor crawled forward a little more, keeping his head close to the floor so that he could, if possible, meet her glance. Was he a beast, that music should move him like this? He felt as if the way to the unknown nourishment he longed for was being revealed. He resolved to advance right up to his sister, pluck her by the skirt to intimate that he was asking her to come with her violin into his room, for no one here was rewarding her playing as he would reward it. He wouldn't let her out of his

room ever again, at least not while he was alive; his terrifying figure should be useful to him for the first time; he would post himself by all the doors of his room at once and go hissing to meet his attackers; but his sister should stay with him, not under duress, but of her own free will; she should sit next to him on the sofa, incline her ear down to him, and he would confide to her his firm intention of sending her to the conservatoire, and, if this misfortune hadn't got in the way, he would have told everybody last Christmas—Christmas was over, wasn't it?—without caring about any kind of objection to it. After this explanation his sister would burst into tears of emotion and Gregor would rear up as far as her shoulders and kiss her throat, which, ever since she had been working at the shop, was free of ribbon or collar.

'Herr Samsal!' called the middle gentleman, and without wasting another word pointed with his forefinger at Gregor, who was moving slowly forward. The violin fell silent. Shaking his head, the gentleman-lodger in the middle smiled just once at his friends and then looked in Gregor's direction once more. Instead of driving Gregor off, the father seemed to think it was more necessary to calm the gentlemen down first, although they were not in the least agitated, and Gregor seemed to amuse them more than the violin. He rushed up to them, and with outstretched arms tried to urge them back into their room, his body at the same time depriving them of their view of Gregor. They now became actually quite angry; it was unclear whether this was on account of the father's behaviour or because it now dawned on them that, without knowing it, they had possessed a neighbour like Gregor. They demanded explanations from the father, raised their own arms, plucked restively at their beards, and only slowly retreated towards their room. Meanwhile Gregor's sister had got over the bemused state she had fallen into after the sudden interruption of her playing, and, after she had held violin and bow in her drooping hands for a while and then gone on looking at her music as if she were still playing, she suddenly pulled herself together, put the instrument into her mother's lap (who was still sitting in her chair gasping, her lungs heaving violently), and dashed into the next room, which the gentlemen, driven on by her father, were already approaching even faster. Gregor saw how her practised hands made blankets and pillows on the beds fly into the air and settle themselves tidily. Before the gentlemen had reached their room she had finished



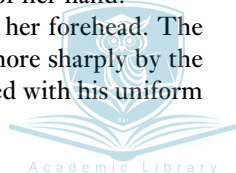
making the beds and slipped out. The father seemed to be carried away by his stubbornness again, so that he forgot the respect which, after all, he owed his tenants. He drove them and drove them until, already in the doorway, the middle gentleman stamped thunderously with his foot, bringing the father to a standstill. 'I hereby declare', he said, looking round to include mother and sister too, 'that in view of the revolting conditions prevailing in this apartment and this family'—so saying, he spat briefly and decisively onto the floor—'I am giving my notice this instant. Naturally I shall not pay a penny, and that goes for the days I have been living here too; and then again I shall also consider whether I shan't make any claims—believe me, easy to justify—against you.' He fell silent, looking straight in front of him, as if he were expecting something. His two friends did in fact promptly break in with the words: 'We are giving notice this instant too.' At that he seized the latch and slammed the door shut with a crash.

The father staggered, groping his way to his armchair and falling into it. It looked as if he were stretching out for his usual evening nap, but the severe bobbing of his head, as if it had lost its support, showed that he certainly wasn't sleeping. All along, Gregor had lain still on the spot where the gentleman-lodgers had first caught him listening. Disappointment at the way his plan had miscarried, but also perhaps his infirmity after starving for so long, made it impossible for him to move. He feared with some certainty that a general cataclysm was about to be visited on him, and waited. He didn't even start when the violin, slipping from his mother's trembling fingers, fell from her lap and gave out a resounding note.

'Parents dear,' said his sister, striking the table with her hand by way of introduction, 'it can't go on like this. I will not utter my brother's name in front of this monster, so I will simply say: we must try to get rid of it. We have tried everything humanly possible, looking after it and putting up with it; I don't think anyone can reproach us in the slightest for that.'

'She's right a thousand times over,' said her father to himself. Her mother, who still could not catch her breath, with a wild look in her eyes, began a stifled coughing into the cover of her hand.

Gregor's sister rushed to her mother and held her forehead. The father seemed to have been jolted into thinking more sharply by the sister's words; he sat down, straight-backed, played with his uniform





cap amongst the plates, which were still lying on the table after the gentlemen's meal, and now and then looked across at Gregor as he lay motionless.

'We must try to get rid of it,' his sister now said solely to their father, since their mother couldn't hear anything for coughing, 'it will be the death of you both, I can see it coming. If we all have to work already as hard as we do, we can't put up with this endless agony as well. I certainly can't go on any more.' And she broke into crying so vehemently that her tears fell on to her mother's face, which she wiped dry with mechanical movements of her hand.

'But my child,' said her father compassionately and with remarkable understanding, 'what are we to do?'

Gregor's sister only shrugged her shoulders, indicating the helplessness that had overcome her while she cried, quite unlike her earlier assurance.

'If he understood us,' said the father, half questioningly, but the sister waved her hand vehemently in the midst of her tears, indicating that this was inconceivable.

'If he understood us,' the father repeated, and by closing his eyes, took in the sister's conviction that it was out of the question, 'then perhaps some accommodation with him might be possible. But as it is—'

'It has to go,' cried the sister, 'that is the only way, father. You must just try to get rid of the thought that it is Gregor. Our real misfortune is that we have believed it for so long. But how can it be Gregor? If it were Gregor, he would have understood long ago that it's not possible for human beings to live with a beast like that, and he would have left of his own free will. We wouldn't have a brother then, but we would be able to go on living, and honour his memory. But as it is, this beast is pursuing us and driving away our lodgers; it obviously wants to take over the entire apartment and put us out to sleep on the street. Just look, father,' she suddenly shrieked, 'he's at it again!' And in a fit of terror, which was utterly beyond Gregor's understanding, the sister even abandoned their mother, literally pushing her out of her armchair, as if she would sooner sacrifice her mother than remain so near to Gregor; she rushed behind her father, who also got to his feet, agitated simply by her behaviour and half-raising his arms as though to protect her.

But it hadn't occurred to Gregor for a moment to want to scare anyone, least of all his sister. He had simply begun to turn round to



make his way back into his room, though the effect of his attempts was alarming, for, owing to the sorry state he was in, he had to use his head to help him perform the difficult manoeuvre of turning, raising it several times as he did so, and hitting it on the floor. He paused and looked round. His good intentions seemed to have been recognized; it had only been a momentary fright. Now they all looked at him silently and sadly. His mother was lying in her armchair, her legs pressed together and stretched out straight; her eyes were almost closing from exhaustion; father and sister sat next to each other, the sister had laid her hand round her father's neck.

'Well, now perhaps they'll let me turn round,' thought Gregor, and began his labour once more. He wasn't able to suppress the puffing and panting the effort entailed, and now and again he was also obliged to rest. But no one was forcing him either; it was all left to him. Once he had completed the turn, he began to head straight back. He was astonished at the great distance separating him from his room, and couldn't understand at all how a short time ago, weak as he was, he had covered the same stretch almost without noticing. With his mind all the time on crawling fast, he was scarcely aware that not a word, not a cry, came from his family to disturb him. Only when he was in the doorway he turned his head, not fully, because he could feel his neck stiffening, but even so he could still see that behind him nothing had changed; only his sister was standing up. His last glance fell on his mother, who by now had fallen fast asleep.

He was hardly inside his room before the door was hastily shut, bolted fast, and locked. Gregor was so startled at the sudden noise that his little legs collapsed. It was his sister who had moved so fast. She had already been standing there waiting, and then, light-footed, she had leapt forward. Gregor hadn't heard her coming at all, and then: 'At last!' she cried to her parents, as she turned the key in the lock.

'And now?' Gregor asked himself, and looked around in the darkness. He soon discovered he was no longer able to move at all. He wasn't at all surprised; rather, it seemed to him to be unnatural that up till now he had actually been able to move about on these thin little legs. Otherwise he felt relatively comfortable. True, he had aches and pains all over his body, but it seemed to him that they were gradually getting weaker and weaker and in the end would vanish entirely. He could scarcely feel the apple in his back, rotten by now,

nor the inflammation around it, covered all over in a thin film of dust. He thought back on his family with affection and love. His own opinion that he should vanish was, if possible, even more determined than his sister's. He remained in this state of vacant and peaceful reflection until the tower clock struck three in the morning. He still lived to see the dark begin to grow generally lighter outside the window. Then his head sank down without his willing it, and from his nostrils his last breath faintly flowed.

When the charwoman came early in the morning—from sheer hustle and bustle she would slam all the doors so hard, however often they had asked her not to, that once she had arrived it was impossible to sleep peacefully anywhere in the apartment—when she paid her usual brief visit to Gregor, at first she found nothing peculiar. She thought he was lying there without moving on purpose, sulking: she gave him credit for all sorts of intelligence. She happened to be holding the long broom in her hand, so she tried to tickle Gregor with it from the doorway. When this didn't work, she became annoyed and gave Gregor a prod, but it was only when she had shoved him unresisting from the spot that she began to pay some attention. It did not take her long to recognize the true state of affairs; she opened her eyes wide, whistled to herself, wasted no more of her time, but threw open the bedroom door and shouted into the darkness in a loud voice: 'Come and see; it's snuffed it; it's lying in there, snuffed it. Completely!'

The marital couple sat up straight in the marital bed; they had enough to do to get over the fright the charwoman had given them before they took in her announcement. But once they had, Herr and Frau Samsa got out of bed at speed, one from each side; Herr Samsa threw the bedspread over his shoulders, Frau Samsa emerged wearing only her nightdress; so clad, they entered Gregor's room. Meanwhile the door opened from the living-room, where Grete had been sleeping since the gentleman-lodgers had moved in; she was fully dressed, as if she hadn't slept at all; and her pale face seemed to show it. 'Dead?' said Frau Samsa, looking up at the charwoman questioningly, although she could check it all for herself and recognize it even without checking. 'I'll say he is,' said the charwoman, and to prove it pushed Gregor's corpse a fair way to one side with her broom. Frau Samsa made a move as if she wanted to restrain the broom, but did not do so. 'Well,' said Herr Samsa, 'now we can

thank God.' He crossed himself, and the three women followed his example. Grete, whose eyes had been fixed on the corpse, said: 'Just see how thin he was. He hasn't eaten now for so long. Just the way his food went in, that's how it came out.' And indeed, Gregor's body was completely flat and dry; it was only now they actually perceived it, when he was no longer supported by his little legs and there was nothing else besides to distract their gaze.

'Come in to us for a little while, Grete,' said Frau Samsa with a melancholy smile, and Grete followed her parents, not without looking back at the corpse, into their bedroom. The charwoman closed the door and opened the window wide. Although it was early morning, there was already a touch of mildness in the fresh air. It was just the end of March.

The three gentleman-lodgers emerged from their room and looked around for their breakfast in astonishment; the family had forgotten them. 'Where's our breakfast?' the one in the middle asked the charwoman gruffly. She put her finger to her lips and beckoned the gentlemen hastily and silently to come into Gregor's room. And come in they did, and with their hands in the pockets of their rather shabby jackets, they stood in the room, by now fully bright, around Gregor's corpse.

Then the bedroom door opened and Herr Samsa appeared in his uniform, his wife on one arm, his daughter on the other. They all showed signs of weeping; from time to time Grete pressed her face against her father's arm.

'Leave my home at once!' said Herr Samsa, and pointed towards the door without letting go of the women. 'What do you mean?' said the middle gentleman, rather taken aback, with a sickly smile. The other two put their hands behind their backs, all the time rubbing them together, as though in joyful expectation of a huge row which was bound to end in their favour. 'I mean exactly what I say,' replied Herr Samsa, and, lined up with his two companions, he made for the gentleman-lodger, who first of all stood still, looking at the floor, as if the things in his head were rearranging themselves in a new order. 'Then we'll go,' he said, looking up at Herr Samsa as if, overcome by sudden humility, he required further permission even for this decision. Herr Samsa merely nodded shortly to him several times, with a glare. At that the gentleman actually strode into the front hall; his two friends had already been listening for a while with their hands

quite still, and they practically hopped after him now, as if they were afraid Herr Samsa might enter the front hall ahead of them and break the connection with their leader. Once in the hall, the three took their hats from the hat-rack and their sticks from the umbrella-stand, bowed in silence, and left the apartment. In—as it turned out—utterly unfounded mistrust, Herr Samsa, still with the two women, went out on to the landing. Leaning on the banisters, they watched as the three gentlemen went slowly but steadily down the long staircase, disappearing at a bend in the stairs at each floor and reappearing after a few moments; the lower they went, the more the Samsa family lost interest in them, and when a butcher's boy came climbing proudly towards them and then higher up above them, tray on head, Herr Samsa soon left the landing with the women and they all returned, as if relieved, into their apartment.

They decided to use the present day to rest and take a stroll; they had not only earned this interruption to their work, they absolutely needed it. And so they sat down at the table and wrote three notes of excuse, Herr Samsa to his head manager, Frau Samsa to her client, and Grete to the proprietor of her shop. While they were writing, the charwoman came in to tell them that she was about to go, as her morning's work was done. Busy with their writing, at first the three merely nodded without looking up. It was only when the charwoman still made no attempt to leave that they looked up in annoyance. 'Well?' asked Herr Samsa. The charwoman stood smiling in the doorway, as if she had some great good fortune to tell the family, but would only do so if questioned closely. The little ostrich feather, sticking almost upright in her hat, which had annoyed Herr Samsa all the time she had worked for them, waved lightly in all directions. 'So what is it you want?' asked Frau Samsa, the one the charwoman respected most. 'Well,' answered the charwoman, who was unable to continue speaking at first for sheer good-natured laughter, 'about how to get rid of that stuff in the next room, you don't have to worry about it. I've seen to it.' Frau Samsa and Grete bent over their letters, as if they wanted to go on writing; Herr Samsa, who observed that the charwoman was about to describe everything in detail, dismissed this firmly with outstretched hand. But as she was not allowed to tell her tale, she remembered the great hurry she was in and called out, obviously offended: 'Bye, all,' turned wildly, and left the apartment with a terrible slamming of doors.



'She'll get her notice this evening,' said Herr Samsa, but received no answer, neither from his wife nor from his daughter, for the charwoman seemed to have upset their barely gained composure again. They rose, went to the window, and remained there, arms round each other. Herr Samsa turned towards them in his armchair and watched them quietly for a while. Then he called: 'Come over here. Let go of the old things at last. And show a little consideration for me too.' At once the women did as they were told, hastened to him, caressed him, and quickly finished their letters.

Then all three left the apartment together, something they had not done for months, and took the tram out into the open country outside the town. The sun shone warm right through the carriage where they were sitting. Leaning back comfortably in their seats, they discussed their prospects for the future, and it emerged on closer inspection that these were not at all bad, for the jobs all three of them held, which they had never actually asked one another about, were extremely good, and, looking ahead, particularly promising. For the moment of course the greatest improvement in their situation was bound to come simply from a change of dwelling; they proposed to take an apartment that was smaller and cheaper, but in a better location and generally more practical than their present one, which was still the one that Gregor had chosen. While they were talking like this together, it occurred to Herr and Frau Samsa at almost the same time, as they looked at their daughter becoming more and more full of life, how, in spite of all the distress that had made her cheeks so pale, she had blossomed of late into a handsome, full-figured girl. Growing quieter and coming almost unconsciously to an understanding as they exchanged glances, they reflected that it was also getting to be time to look for a good husband for her. And they felt it was like a confirmation of their new dreams and good intentions when, as they came to the end of their journey, their daughter was the first to rise from her seat, and she stretched her young body.

